



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 22 February 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
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Jacinta Allan

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Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

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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 ¹	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 ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁵	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁶	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁶ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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Thursday 22 February 2024

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

Business of the house

Orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:33): General business, order of the day 3, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions

Neerim District Rural Primary School

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 128 signatures:

Issue:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the potential closure of the Neerim District Rural Primary School (NDRPS). NDRPS faced destaffing in 2020 due to low enrolments. Despite this, the school remained officially open and could be restaffed if necessary. Since 2020, there has been a noticeable lack of support or collaboration from the Department of Education (DET) regarding NDRPS's status. Recently, the Neerim District community was approached by the DET to provide feedback on the permanent closure of NDRPS with just one weeks' notice. Despite attempts in obtaining a clear timeline and process from DET, the community has been unsuccessful. The community needs more time to engage DET and stakeholders before a decision is made. DET's claims about minimal enrolment interest and a scarcity of primary-aged students in the area contradict our communities' experiences. Our area comprises numerous young families, including many new families. Many parents seeking enrolment at NDRPS have reported receiving insufficient or inaccurate information about enrolling in a destaffed school. The community urgently requires the opportunity to explore enrolment interest and disseminate accurate information about the school's status.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to; 1. Maintain the school's operational status. 2. Collaborate with a group of parents and locals to devise a strategy for restaffing the school. 3. Allow the school site to continue supporting local early education groups (such as Mary Beck Kinder and the playgroup). 4. Acknowledge the significance of providing local and accessible educational opportunities for rural families and their communities. 5. Recognise the historical and communal importance of the site by ensuring it remains available for community use.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Rosebud Hospital

Sam GROTH (Nepean) presented a petition bearing 3506 signatures:

Issue

We the undersigned residents of Victoria draw to the attention of the House community support to redevelop the Rosebud Hospital to address its dated infrastructure and inadequate facilities. The Rosebud Hospital continues to be a project of immense importance and a key development in the health and wellbeing of residents on the southern peninsula.

Action

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Victorian Government to fund the much-needed redevelopment of the Rosebud Hospital to help fix the health care crisis on the southern Mornington Peninsula.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

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

Family Violence Protection Act 2008 – Report 2022–23 on the implementation of the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) – Report 2022–23.

*Business of the house***Adjournment**

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

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday 5 March 2024.

Motion agreed to.*Members statements***Murray Plains electorate volunteers**

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:36): I want to give a shout-out to all the great community volunteers in my part of Victoria that make it such a special place to live along the Murray River. The community events calendar is absolutely chock-a-block at the moment. Those events are driven by the community volunteers, and I would like to thank them for what they do for our communities. Whether it is the harness racing at Gunbower or Boort that is coming up, whether it is the gallops in Swan Hill or Echuca or the Kerang racing carnival on Easter Saturday, it is the volunteers that put it together. Particularly the Kerang racing event is all volunteers – there are no paid staff that put that together, so a great event there.

I recently got to attend the Summerwave music festival in Kerang, which the youth volunteers of the town put together – a great event for everyone there in Atkinson Park in Kerang. We are seeing the cricket finals and the tennis finals coming up. Those clubs are driven by volunteers in our community, and I thank them for what they do to have the sporting opportunities there for both young people and the older adults who play cricket and tennis. Most importantly, the football and netball season is starting shortly. Think about all the volunteers that go there to run the football clubs and the netball clubs. Without them, you would not have the opportunity for sport in the town, so thank you to all the volunteers in my electorate who make it such a great place to live.

Water safety

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (09:37): Today the top temperature is forecast to be 38 degrees, with thunderstorms and severe hot weather, and we know many Victorians will seek refuge either in backyard pools or at beaches around Australia. It is in that vein that I want to highlight the importance of water safety, because Victoria has had a deadly spike in water harm. The Life Saving Victoria annual report tabled recently showed 59 lives lost due to drowning last financial year, a 33 per cent increase on the past decade. Sadly, we had our worst incident – four members of one family, of Indian descent, passed away near Phillip Island. This was the worst incident in 20 years. One of the family members was quoted in the local paper saying they were all holding hands when:

“The second wave ... pushed my brother-in-law out, but took everybody ... in ...

“In a few seconds, we lost everybody.”

Sadly, all these deaths were preventable, and that is why I want to acknowledge the great work of the VICSWIM Summer Kidz program, because we do know how incredibly important water safety is. Water conditions can change in an instant. Whether you are at the beach or even in the backyard pool, it is as simple as turning your back, or a slippery deck can sometimes come along, and it can all go wrong in less than a minute. We want, as a government, to ensure our littlest Victorians know how important water safety is and to ensure that every child, no matter their background or their circumstances, can swim. I am very proud of the VICSWIM Summer Kidz program, which has been going since 1976. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to welcome the Minister for Community Sport Ros Spence to the East Keilor Leisure Centre just recently on this program.

Inkerman Street bike lane

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:39): Imagine building a bike lane to nowhere. Imagine being a small business that is already struggling with cost-of-living pressures and is about to have 100 car spaces taken from outside the front of its premises and access limited for a bike lane to nowhere. Inkerman Street has two councils, Glen Eira and Port Phillip. Glen Eira council have already rejected a bike lane, with many residents saying this bike lane makes no sense. Port Phillip want to pursue a bike lane to nowhere. They want to spend millions of dollars of ratepayers money to ultimately provide a bike lane that goes absolutely nowhere. We would call on the council in Port Phillip to not waste taxpayers money.

We know Save Inkerman Street have been running a campaign to try and ensure that this money is not wasted. The iconic Inkerman Hotel's current owner Scott Roberts says this makes no sense. After 23 years of running his pub he knows this is going to be a struggle for his business. One of two Kosher butchers in Melbourne, Melbourne Kosher Butchers, which serves 600 clients, realise their business will struggle. Jaz Bradley runs an audio equipment business with heavy equipment. She will not be able to get that equipment back into the store. Inkerman Street has many businesses – PCYC, a gym, will struggle. They cannot simply continue to waste taxpayers money.

Ron Cole

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:40): I rise to celebrate the outstanding contributions of Ron Cole, a truly great person and the beating heart of Kyneton District Soccer Club. Ron's recent recognition as Male Volunteer of the Year by Football Victoria is testament to his commitment and the profound impact he has had on the beautiful game and the broader community in Kyneton. For over four decades Ron has given so much to the club as president, coach and mentor. His leadership has not only elevated the Kyneton District Soccer Club but fostered a club identity of belonging and inclusion. His tireless advocacy has led to investment in soccer infrastructure upgrades, ensuring that the facilities there welcome everyone. Indeed under his leadership female participation at Kyneton has grown by an astonishing 650 per cent. Ron's dedication extends beyond the confines of the soccer field. As vice-president of the Bendigo Amateur Soccer League he has spearheaded initiatives promoting mental health awareness, cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Congratulations, Ron, on this accolade, and thank you for all that you do.

Tony Davis

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:41): Congratulations also to Macedon Ranges Shire Council Citizen of the Year Tony Davis. Way back in 1970 Tony helped form Kyneton Little Athletics, and since that time he has volunteered every Saturday morning, racking up an amazing 53 years of supporting young athletes. Over the years Tony has held so many roles at the club. Thank you, Tony, for your dedication to the community. We are all grateful for everything that you have done for the people of the Macedon Ranges.

Western Victoria fires

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:42): I neglected to mention yesterday in my contribution during the matter of public importance debate the great work of Emergency Recovery Victoria, and in particular I would like to mention Angela Carey and Kendra Clegg, who have done an outstanding job in supporting the community through their recovery. I would also like to acknowledge Abbie Wilson from National Insurance Brokers. Abbie is an absolute superstar. She has been an advocate for people who have not been fully insured, and we have had wonderful news this morning. There was a premium that was not paid three months ago because an elderly woman was transitioning into care, and we have got news this morning that the insurance will be reinstated and the claim for her house, which burnt to the ground, will be covered in full. Congratulations, Abbie, and well done to the family for advocating for that.

Cromie Street, Rupanyup

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:42): We have many, many issues with potholes in my local roads. We have a particularly dangerous pothole in the main street of Rupanyup at the intersection with Walter Street, where there is significant lifting of the road. Dale Maggs, who is a fierce advocate for safe roads as a motorcycle rider, has been fighting for this road to be fixed for three long years now. I urge the government to get on with making our roads safe to save country lives.

Lowan electorate health services

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:43): I would also like to mention concerns of my constituents about the vacancy of Western District Health Service CEO. The Casterton hospital CEO position has not been filled for a long time. With the Portland hospital CEO position, again we do not know what is happening there. There is a great risk we are going to see the same catastrophic failures in health that we have seen with Grampians Health. I urge the government – *(Time expired)*

Werribee electorate schools

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (09:43): I rise to update the house on three new schools that have recently opened in my electorate. In our rapidly growing community access to education is vital. That is why the Allan Labor government invested more than \$500 million in the 2022–23 state budget for the construction of new schools right across our great state. I congratulate Nganboo Borron School, Walcom Ngarra Secondary College and Laa Yulta Primary School on their recent opening. Of course more schools mean more local kids have more access to quality education in their immediate community. All these schools are equipped with modern learning areas, air conditioning and heating and outside shade sails for sun protection. I want to congratulate the principals respectively: Michele Marcu, Brad Moyle and Mark Zahra. I look forward to meeting with them all in due course.

As a result of the Allan Labor government's investment, 50 per cent of all new schools opening this year are in the Wyndham LGA. These new schools highlight the needs of our growing youth community, and I wish all the students at these schools all the very best as they start or continue their education journey.

Krushnadevsinh Ravalji

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (09:45): I also want to briefly just mention and congratulate Kano Ravalji, who has received an award recognising him for his contributions to the local community and has led youth empowerment in Wyndham.

Justice Lex Lasry

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:45): This Friday marks the resignation of Justice Lex Lasry from the Supreme Court after 17 years of exemplary service. In the words of former Chief Justice

Marilyn Warren, he is 'a judge of absolute integrity'. The judge announced his resignation mid-hearing after being made aware that the Director of Public Prosecutions had made a complaint against him to the Judicial Commission of Victoria. The complaint alleged that the judge's actions in court:

... had the tendency to diminish public confidence in the administration of justice in Victoria and diminish the confidence ... in His Honour's impartiality and independence.

Having overturned one of Justice Lasry's rulings before the Court of Appeal, the DPP then made this personal complaint against the judge. It is notable that the DPP failed to raise it with Justice Lasry in open court. The DPP is not a judicial officer and exercises executive power, not judicial power. But unlike ministers, who are accountable to the Parliament, the DPP has no accountability here, despite her exercise of executive authority. I agree that the DPP must be independent, but independence should not mean unaccountable. The DPP took after Justice Lasry with far more vigour than she ever pursued Nicola Gobbo or others responsible for the Lawyer X scandal. To preserve public confidence in the administration of justice in Victoria we must ensure that the independence of the office of DPP does not also mean unaccountability to Victorians.

Container deposit scheme

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:46): I rise to speak about the immense success of the container deposit scheme in my electorate of Mill Park. Constituents in the electorate have enthusiastically taken up the program, with more than 660,000 containers returned at local locations. That is 267,359 cans, 10,932 cartons, 122,211 glass containers and 259,811 plastic containers. It means more than \$66,000 is back in the hands of the local community, all the while reducing the amount of waste that ends up in landfill. Our most popular location, at the Meadow Glen athletics track in Epping, is receiving on average 6342 containers each day. I encourage all residents to download the CDS Vic North app so that they can choose to receive their funds electronically or indeed donate to one of the hundreds of registered organisations. With two CDS reverse vending machines installed in the electorate and a third to open this coming Friday, residents in the electorate are not slowing down.

Lunar New Year

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:48): I would also like to wish all who celebrate it a happy Lunar New Year, and I certainly want to extend a thankyou to the Chinese Seniors Friendship Association of Whittlesea and Mill Park and the Whittlesea Chinese Association for the wonderful community events they hosted to celebrate this most auspicious of occasions.

Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:48): I rise this morning to put to this government that the promise that they made to my community about the reform and the change of operating procedures around the Great Ocean Road, that hugely iconic piece of infrastructure and landscape for Victorians, has not worked, is not working and continues to frustrate local communities. The Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority was designed to simplify the management, the looking after and the creating of a sense of place from Torquay through to Port Campbell along the iconic Great Ocean Road. Today we see GORCAPA at war – literally at war – with the communities right along the coast and, more worryingly, with the local council areas.

Recently the Colac Otway shire moved a motion of no confidence in GORCAPA. Why did they move a motion of no confidence? Because GORCAPA refuses to take into account the needs, desires and aspirations of local communities but instead is putting its state government stamp on the way our local community is to operate. I draw to your attention two iconic spots along the Great Ocean Road: Point Grey in Lorne and the Apollo Bay harbour, two important places where literally millions of dollars were allocated back in 2018 and still nothing has happened. The community is being ignored, and I call on this government to immediately look at a review of this authority.

Family violence

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:49): I was pleased to host the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and neighbouring Eltham MP Vicki Ward to inspect progress on the transformation of the old convent buildings at Saint Bernadette's in Ivanhoe. The Allan government has allocated \$2.15 million to partner with Good Samaritan Inn and the Catholic parish of Ivanhoe to build 10 new units for women and children experiencing family violence. It is a great project that reflects the community values of residents in my Ivanhoe electorate, and we appreciate the support of Banyule city councillors through the planning process. With Minister Ward, we also had a briefing from the amazing team at the Orange Door in Heidelberg. We know that sometimes things at home or in a relationship are not okay, but the experienced, professional staff at the Orange Door, funded and established by the state Labor government, is here to listen and ensure that people get the help they need. We are very grateful for the dedication and commitment of the local Orange Door staff at Heidelberg.

Veterans support

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:50): Yesterday the Minister for Veterans attended the opening of the V Centre, a one-stop hub with wraparound services and support for veterans facing homelessness. Vasey RSL Care has a long history in Ivanhoe, and they provide vital care, accommodation and support for the veteran community. With the Simpson army barracks and the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital located in the Ivanhoe electorate, our community has a strong representation of serving ADF members, veterans and their families, and we thank them all for their service.

Ministerial visits

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:51): Tomorrow we will be on the road with the member for Yan Yean at Mernda police station. We will be checking out the \$28.8 million redevelopment of the new Benalla police station, dropping in at the Wang Turf Club to see the half-million-dollar development work that is happening there. I will be at the Wodonga police station and then on Saturday at the Dederang Cup with the member for Ovens Valley.

Emil Madsen Reserve, Mount Eliza

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (09:51): Last weekend I was at the Emil Madsen Reserve for the Mount Eliza Cricket Club's women's and men's grand finals, along with Renee Heath, a Liberal member for Eastern Victoria. It was great to see so many people there supporting community sport. I discussed again the limited facilities at Emil Madsen. Teams have outgrown their pavilions, with a lack of change rooms, especially for girls. Many are currently operating out of portables, and some games are being relocated. Emil Madsen is the highest participation sporting facility in Victoria at the grassroots level, with over 2200 participants across five sports, but they have substandard facilities. Federal Labor went out to make a faux new announcement for Emil Madsen; however, no new money has been committed. The funds that are there from the federal level were already budgeted, and the shire was contacted about these funds being delivered months ago. The only reason that a redevelopment has not occurred is that state Labor have not committed a cent to it. The project remains \$15 million short of the \$35 million needed. The state Liberals promised funding at the last election, but state Labor ignores it. If the federal Labor government was serious about fixing Emil Madsen, they should have a word to their friends in the state Labor government. Nathan Conroy and I continue to advocate for actual further funding for Emil Madsen.

Williamstown electorate sporting clubs

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:52): Today I rise to say that community spirit can be found in my local sporting clubs. There were a few

events over the last couple of weeks, and let me name one of them. The third annual Williamstown Cricket Club Think Pink ladies luncheon saw more than 160 locals come together in support of BreastWest and the McGrath Foundation. This event has grown enormously from 31 people just three years ago. We had the pleasure of listening to Dr Chantel Thornton, who was once a trainee registrar at Williamstown Hospital and is now a surgeon specialising in preventative and surgical treatment of breast cancer. Congratulations to all involved in such a wonderful event.

On the same day, the Newport Rams Baseball Club held their heritage day, and they celebrated their history and the progress of the club. It was great to recognise the tireless efforts and the commitment of the newly inducted life members, Chris Bramwell and Dean Anglin, as well as six women's and men's senior games played across the day. But did you know that baseball is really alive and well in my electorate, with Altona being the home to the Melbourne Aces? It is the largest baseball stadium in Australia. This is where I found myself on Sunday, watching the Australian baseball team take on South Korean team the Hanwha Eagles. It came down to the final pitch of the game, but the Hanwha Eagles came back from two runs down to defeat Australia 5–3.

Education funding

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:54): What happened to truly public education? Our schools here are the second lowest funded in the country, and in my electorate, some schools have not been able to do basic maintenance in decades. They have got old carpets, toilet doors that will not close and staircases that are literally lifting off the floor. It means that schools are having to ask their parents to cover the absolute basics – school nurses, first-aid kits. One school even had to get parents to fund replacing a leaky septic tank. I mean, what kind of a crappy fundraiser is that? Other schools are surveying parents to see whether they should drop languages or art or other non-core subjects that I am sure many would agree are crucial to a rounded education.

Literally millions of dollars per school is being raised by parents for what is supposed to be free public education, and the problem is that Labor uses school funding as a tasty election treat for marginal areas. Pork-barrelling is wrong in any situation, but it is unforgivable to put our students' safety and education on the line for political outcomes. It is not too much to ask for a properly funded, independent school building authority so that funding for schools is delivered transparently and based on need.

Housing

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:55): I was delighted to join the Minister for Housing at Flemington recently, when we welcomed back residents who took acceptance of brand new homes delivered by the Allan Labor government. Previously there were 188 dreadful concrete walk-ups, which were freezing cold in winter and boiling hot in summer. We removed those 188 properties and we replaced them with 359 properties – 240 social homes and 119 affordable homes.

Affordable homes are incredibly important, I believe, because you want key workers living in the communities that they serve. You want to make sure that if a nurse is working at the Royal Melbourne Hospital they can live close to the Royal Melbourne, as opposed to having to travel from 50 kilometres away. It is about making sure that we have got a mix of housing stock. There is a very large African–Australian community in the state district of Essendon, many of whom have large families. What we have developed here are homes of between one and four bedrooms. It builds on the work that we did over at Dunlop Avenue in Ascot Vale, where we removed 80 walk-up dwellings and replaced them with 200 new homes – half social and half affordable.

I note the Greens are not here, because they have shown no interest in these things. These people have opposed every single investment that the Andrews–Allan Labor governments have made in social

housing. We are the only game in town when it comes to making sure that the poor have the houses they deserve.

Narracan electorate storms

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:57): I rise today, and I would like to talk about our wonderful volunteers in my electorate of Narracan. On the back of last week and the catastrophic storms that went through Mirboo North, a lot of our CFA volunteers from across the region went up there to help the Mirboo North community and also out to my communities in Neerim South. Thorpdale itself also got hit pretty hard. It is great to see that local community spirit come together when tragedy strikes.

Railway Hotel, Warragul

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:57): I would also like to put a shout-out today to the Railway Hotel in Warragul. This hotel has served my community for many, many years. I can remember going in there as a young fella –

Tim McCurdy: As a 16-year-old.

Wayne FARNHAM: as a 16-year-old. But unfortunately, due to COVID, taxes and increasing WorkCover premiums, they will have to shut the door as it is no longer viable. To Justin Dash I would like to say: congratulations, Justin. Thank you for serving our community and cold beer for many, many years. Enjoy your break, and all the best for the future.

SongMakers

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:58): There is no denying that Victoria is the undisputed music capital of the country, and the Allan Labor government is proud to back our vibrant music industry. Every day of the week there is amazing live music to enjoy, whether it is major international stadium shows like Taylor Swift's, a festival or an up-and-coming homegrown band in a local pub or club. Taylor Swift, for example, started out writing songs as a teenager, and now she is dominating the world stage. We know all over Victoria there are teenagers sitting in their bedrooms strumming a guitar or making music digitally, writing what could be the next big worldwide hit.

That is why the Allan Labor government is supporting the next era of Victorian hit makers with what will be the biggest schools songwriting program in the country. We are partnering with APRA AMCOS to supercharge and expand their SongMakers program here in Victoria. This songwriting mentorship program brings professional musicians into schools to deliver songwriting and skills development workshops for students in years 10 to 12. More than 60 Victorian high schools and 1400 young people will participate over the next two years. Students will learn about songwriting, music production, intellectual property and so much more, all the tools they need to forge a successful career in music. The Allan Labor government is proud to back our world-famous music industry from the classroom to the band room and beyond.

World Encephalitis Day

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (09:59): Today, 22 February, is World Encephalitis Day, the global awareness day for people who have been directly or indirectly affected by encephalitis – people like Debbie Burke, a young mother in my electorate who lost her beautiful mum Cathy to encephalitis in May last year. Debbie is determined to raise awareness about this disease, a disease which causes an inflammation of the brain through infection or a person's own immune system attacking the brain in error. It can have a sudden onset, and unfortunately it is commonly misdiagnosed as a stroke. Awareness, early diagnosis and treatment will save lives and improve outcomes for people.

I am honoured to acknowledge Debbie for her campaign, starting locally in my electorate, to raise awareness of this devastating condition. I was inspired to meet Debbie and her family and friends, all

dressed in red, last Sunday at the eighth Carrum Coast Guard Around the River Fun Run, and today, thanks to Debbie, the Kingston town hall will be lit up red like other landmarks the world over. Debbie, you are an inspiration. Thank you for bringing attention to this disease, encephalitis, a disease that 77 per cent of people worldwide do not even know about. You are changing that, and you are making a difference.

Bonbeach Primary School

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (10:01): Congratulations to Bonbeach Primary School captains for 2024: Jackson Richards, Harry Whiteside, Charlotte Woodyard and Mia Carpenter. I know they will be wonderful role models and school leaders this year.

Carrum Downs Secondary College

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (10:01): Congratulations to Carrum Downs Secondary College school captains for 2024: Liam Vella, Robin Haddon, Joe Boyen and Toby Hines-Cavanagh. I know you will be a terrific attribute for your school.

Bass electorate storms

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:01): In adversity our community is beyond extraordinary. They get out and act. Their spirit of generosity and care is immeasurable. My heartfelt gratitude to our SES units and CFA brigades and a remarkable band of community volunteers across my electorate of Bass who responded to last Tuesday's storm event, which tore through our area, leaving fallen powerlines and toppled trees, roofs were sent flying, cars were damaged, sheds crushed and power and phones out for days. They put others above themselves to help clear and clean up yards, streets and highways. Your dedication, hard work and community spirit is so appreciated.

This generosity of spirit extended to so many small businesses all putting their products, produce and services in the big toolbox of wares required and community members dropping off generators to make sure local stores could continue supplying essentials and farmers could milk cattle. Pharmacies operated in the dark, ensuring medicines were dispensed. Teachers at our schools and kinders continued to provide a welcoming learning environment through outages; our kids are remarkably resilient and caring. The Bass Coast Health and Koo Wee Rup and district health service teams immediately went out to check on those needing support and care. They too are all heart. Our paramedics and police were equally visible and present. To everyone that assisted and continues to do so across our community centres – clubs, Red Cross, government agencies, councils – it is a glorious collective that has time and again shown its true community colours.

Mollie Holman Award

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:02): Congratulations to the outstanding students from the Box Hill electorate who received the 2023 Mollie Holman STEAM awards: Michelle Woang and Toby Wheeler from Box Hill High School, Nikita Thornton and Markus To from Blackburn High School, Alfie Watkins and Nicole Li from Blackburn Primary School, Alfie McNeil and Frankie Wines from Box Hill North Primary School, Gordon Hui and Vaahin Naik Nate from Kerrimuir Primary School, Ben Harding and Keira Singleton from Koonung Secondary College, Daphne Lai and Eli Abeyratne from Laburnum Primary School, Cooper Wightman and Mia Rui from Mont Albert Primary School, Jaanvi Kanakuntla and Eli Ness from Old Orchard Primary School, Jake Rogers from Orchard Grove Primary School, Zoe Bairamis from Our Lady of Sion College, Aston Wels and Hazel Barnett from Roberts McCubbin Primary School and Anna Mariadason and Aayan Somaiyo from St Francis Xavier Primary School. The Mollie Holman Award is annual award presented to students within the Box Hill electorate for their contribution to the promotion of STEAM education within the school environment. I hope that their passion and enthusiasm for STEAM education continue to burn bright throughout this year and the years ahead.

Australia Day awards

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:04): Congratulations to two outstanding individuals in the Box Hill community who were recognised at the recent Australia Day celebrations: Ms Geraldine Joy Anderson OAM, for her Medal of the Order of Australia for services to vocational education; and Ms Adele Marie Schonhardt OAM, for the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to the arts. Congratulations to all.

Zimbabwean community

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:04): I am so lucky to have the Zimbabwean Community in Australia Victoria president in my community in Cranbourne, so I was really pleased to have the opportunity to catch up with Enock and Tinashe a couple of weeks ago. They have got a great event coming up at Easter and they are bringing a lot of people together for a football match – some people call it soccer; it is certainly ‘football’ in our family – and netball as well. I am very grateful, as always, to the Zimbabwean community, who work so hard to bring the community together, many of them as clinicians. Many members of the Zimbabwean community have come to Australia and are really supporting our healthcare system, and I know the Minister for Health will be happy to have so many of our Zimbabwean community members working in the healthcare system.

Lent

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:05): In the Lenten season I am going to wish all the best to St Agatha’s parish’s Father Antony and Father Prabhu, to Father Joseph on his new gig as he moves to his new parish and to Father Denis O’Byrne at St Thomas’s in Clyde North.

Sikh Volunteers Australia

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:05): Finally, the Sikh volunteers as always have gone to help people in the storms. I know that they are constituents of the member for Hastings, but I have them in my heart as well.

Geelong Rainbow

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:05): Last Saturday the Geelong Rainbow community celebrated the rainbow festival in Geelong, which was so well attended. It is an annual event. There are lots of activities and entertainers. Goldie Cox, who traditionally has been the MC for the event, was there again. It was great to catch up with them and enjoy all the different activities – the facepainting for the kids, the entertainment and the different stalls that were there. It was amazing.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Jess Wilson’s amendment:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government:

- (1) provides a preliminary or draft fee structure for the early learning centres (ELCs) scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026;
- (2) seeks written feedback from any childcare centre, kindergarten or preschool within a 15-kilometre radius of the proposed government ELC sites regarding the likely impact of a government ELC on their workforce capacity and enrolments, and provides their feedback to the house;

- (3) conducts an analysis on the childcare workforce implications of the new government ELC sites, including:
 - (a) establishing the workforce vacancy rates around the locations of the new sites; and
 - (b) providing the house with a comprehensive plan on how the government will ensure existing childcare centres and kindergartens are not disadvantaged in their ability to recruit and retain staff in their existing programs; and
- (4) provides an estimate of the budget impact of the operating costs for the government ELCs scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026.'

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:06): It is a pleasure to rise today to talk on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. I would like to thank the staff for their briefing, which I was online for, and thank also the member for Kew, the shadow minister in this portfolio, who has done an enormous amount of work on this. She has put together quite a good position.

The opposition does not oppose this bill. We understand that the intent of the bill is to give the minister the powers to employ people into the future for the 50 government-built centres that they are going to do across the state. It is something that has to happen. I think it is very important that we really do focus on early childhood education, because we all know in this chamber that the earlier kids can learn and develop the better off they will be as they get older. Probably one criticism I might have of the government, and I have said this before in this place, is that I feel as though sometimes we have left the run too late because we do have a shortage of spaces in early learning in Victoria. I think the commitment to free three-year-old kinder at the last election has probably amplified the need to get this going as quickly as we possibly can.

The government have released now details of all of the 50 centres that they going to do across the state, and I would like to thank the government for putting one in Drouin in my electorate of Narracan. I would have liked more, but I am not going to complain about one. I will always give credit where credit is due. But if you can find another four or five for my electorate, that would be fantastic, because unfortunately in my electorate, being one of the fastest growing in the region, we are short of four or five today. The centre that we get, I think, is due to be delivered in 2028. It does not really solve the immediate problem we have. Unfortunately my council are quite short of funds and they really do not have the money to invest in it. So if the government are feeling very generous in this area and they feel as though they might have a little bit of spare cash somewhere, it would be appreciated greatly if it could come into my area, because my area is forecast to grow by another 56 per cent by 2040. It is going to be a burgeoning population by the time we get to 2040, and with the lack of investment in early learning I think it is really important.

I am seriously asking the government to see if they can find more centres for my electorate, because we also need the workforce in regional Victoria. That is why these early learning centres are actually so important, so that we can get women especially back to work. Women do not necessarily want to sit at home all day. Some do, some do not, but I think the majority of women like to be back out in the workforce, and our workforce in this country at the moment needs workers. We do. We need people back out in the workforce. We all know the more people we have working across our state, the better off our economy is – employment will always create economic development. It is really important, and it will be interesting to see how the government goes in the training. I will be perfectly honest: I do not know if we have a shortage of educators in this area or not. I am making an assumption we probably do because of the demand we have now on early learning centres. I can nearly understand why the government has staggered the release of the 50 new centres they are going to build, because I feel as though we need to catch up on the training as well and to get those people in those positions to train these kids.

There was one question I asked in the bill briefing, and I am quite curious about how the government will deal with this, which is the wage structure of the new 1200 strong workforce that is going to be required and what enterprise bargaining agreement they will come under. I do fear that maybe this

workforce that has traditionally not been unionised could end up being unionised. I do not know if that is a good thing or a bad thing for early education, but I would hate to think that if there was ever a pay dispute we would have early educators walking away from early education to get a pay rise. I think we need to be very, very careful here. We do not want to play with early education in that manner. We do not have a problem with the bill. We understand what the intent of the bill is.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:12): I am so glad to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. I am looking forward to coming back to the member for Narracan's comments about unionised workers, but I will save that for a bit later.

This bill is another step in our excellent progress with the Best Start, Best Life policy. This is the type of policy that only a government like ours can introduce. We are a government that understands families, understands what it is like for working women and understands the pressures that families are under. We are a government that values education for young people, and we are putting all of our efforts and resources into making sure that our young people have the best start in life.

This is an example where a government is stepping in because we know that you cannot always leave it to the market. The market does not always provide for the population in the way that we would hope. We have seen that in the allocation of the 50 spaces based on where the experts have shown us there are childcare deserts. Certainly within Yan Yean we can feel the pinch in areas like Donnybrook, where it can be hard to come by child care and kinder; however, that pinch has eased. We have got more private suppliers coming in. We have our new Myrmiong kindy, which opened this year, that the government built, and we have more coming online.

It is important when the decisions are made they are based on the facts and the needs. This government intervention where the market has failed, we have seen that in other areas. We have seen that especially in mobile telecommunications infrastructure. The Victorian government is stepping in in Donnybrook to co-fund a tower with Telstra, but the biggest and most famous example of the government supporting mobile infrastructure is the federal black spot program. That program is well known to me and to the member for Gisborne because that is a program that was introduced to ensure that telecommunications were available during times of natural disasters and in the lead-up to them, and that is something we have been discussing a lot in the chamber this week.

We have heard from the member for Monbulk, although she was unfortunately, perhaps shamefully, misrepresented by the member for Berwick, in her comments about the difficulties faced by people without telecommunications. But the point I am making is, with such a large national program for vital services, what we saw in 2016 was the Australian National Audit Office absolutely slam the coalition government for using this infrastructure program for pork-barrelling. This was a program that was designed to keep people safe, to ensure that they had essential services during difficult times of natural disaster. What was found was that the coalition, shamefully, used it for political purposes. This is in contrast to our 50 childcare centres, whose locations were determined through data and through the facts. So I seek simply to highlight that it is very good that members are in here advocating for their areas, sharing anecdotes of the difficulties faced by families, but ultimately the decision is made and has been made based on the data and the facts. I am so glad that in an instance where the government is stepping in where the market has failed we are doing it in a way that benefits communities equitably and fairly, and I just highlight that that is in contrast to those opposite.

Something special about what we are doing with the introduction of the new centres is that where possible we are seeking to integrate them with existing or other services that are of benefit to a family. So we know – I have got a child in kindergarten and a child in school – how the morning drop-off and pick-up can be difficult with that double drop-off. It is very sensible that we are seeing the integration of that and hopefully further services as well. Certainly at the Wallan East primary school – that is the interim name of the school that will be built in my electorate as part of the 100 schools by 2026 that this government is delivering – I am looking forward to an integrated kindergarten being onsite there.

It is these details and it is these realities of how families live their lives and what children and families need that can only be delivered by an Allan Labor government, because we understand and we are representative of the broad range of families that live across Victoria. That is why earlier this week I was incredibly proud to be at a sod turn for a toilet. People may see that as shameless, but I had heard from families in our local area that the lack of a toilet at Laurimar shops meant they had great difficulty taking their children to the shops. Mums were resorting to taking their kids for bush wees because there was nowhere to go. Understanding family life and the needs of children, mothers and fathers is what this government does best.

What early childhood educators do best is nourish and support the minds of our young children. It is an oft stated fact that brain development by the age of five is so crucial and really sets children up to reach their full potential later in life, so we rely heavily on our early childhood workers. The member for Narracan said he hoped that that workforce would not be unionised because he feared that they would walk off the job. I am happy to update the member for Narracan about the difficulties faced by early childhood and kinder workers, who in a segmented sector – where their employers are one by one – have much reduced bargaining powers, and as a result, conditions and pay are not what they could be. When that is the case, we have less people being attracted to that workforce.

If we want to ensure that we have enough early childhood workers to care for our youngest Victorians, it is important that that role is appealing and attractive to people, that their rights are protected and that they are paid fairly. The work undertaken by the federal government to look at group bargaining for people such as childcare and kinder workers is an excellent step forward, and it benefits and complements our policy more broadly. And it is a massive policy; it is a massive initiative. The \$14 billion package altogether for Best Start, Best Life means that more children are in three- and four-year-old kinder.

Something that I am looking forward to as part of that package is the rollout of the additional hours in the year before school, because children are absolute sponges at that age, so that pre-prep year – 30 hours a week of play-based learning – is going to have an enormous impact on the lives of those children. We will not see that impact immediately. The immediate benefit will probably be felt by the parents, but over the longer term of those children's lives, the way that they are set up to be able to learn the best that they can is going to absolutely change education in this state. That is what the Allan Labor government, and Labor governments more broadly, are about – they are about investing in education, investing in families and investing in children. This Allan Labor government has a strong focus on children and understanding all that we do through the prism of how it affects children and how we can best support children within their families to reach their full potential. I am absolutely 100 per cent proud to stand here as we debate this bill, which will see further improvements for young people and families in Victoria.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:22): I am so delighted to have the opportunity to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. Early childhood education and the role that our educators have is at the heart of so much of what we do. Hearing the contribution from the member for Yan Yean just reminds me of the importance of having people with children in an early childhood education setting in government so that we can actually make sure that we are pushing forward with reforms that are relevant today. What I am going to talk about is the importance of this legislation, but I am conscious that with my baby now being 22, my experiences – some of them started last century – do date me a little bit and date my children. But I am always delighted, and I welcome the opportunity, to be working alongside people with young families who are indeed here in the chamber to actually hear firsthand about experiences as they are relevant today.

I wake up to the sound of children in the street. Lots of people know that Cranbourne, and indeed the City of Casey, has an extraordinary number of young people. It actually brings so much joy to my community. That sound of young people is indicative of the four classrooms of children a week that are being born into the City of Casey. This bill is focused on providing the necessary powers to the

Secretary of the Department of Education to facilitate the government's commitment to building 50 new government owned and operated early learning centres across Victoria. It is an opportunity for me to pay credit to the Minister for Children in the other place for the important reform work that is being undertaken in this really quite lovely but also core area of responsibility, and it builds on the work that others have undertaken, including the Minister for Education in this Allan Labor government and in the previous Andrews Labor government. We know that centres in communities with insufficient existing childcare provision can also experience high rates of disadvantage. Having an opportunity to send a child to an early childhood setting is absolutely fundamental to our capacity as parents and as people who love children and care for children in whatever capacity – as grandparents or people who provide foster care or kinship care. We know that everyone puts children's needs first.

My first foray into community was when I first started to get involved in my children's kindergarten. For many people the kindergarten or early learning centre is like the village well. That is true everywhere, but I think it is particularly true in parts of Victoria where people perhaps have moved from other states or, as is common for so many of my friends in this chamber, from other countries. Having a place where our children can be educated, having a place that is at the centre of early learning, does give families an opportunity to really connect.

I was just reflecting with some friends about the great educators that I was fortunate to have in my children's lives at Rangeview kinder and the important role of those early friendships that I had. It meant that I was able to have confidence as a parent. I am going to, with your indulgence perhaps, pay credit to Beth Barclay, who provided this extraordinary, straightforward Boston hospitality that meant as another parent I could really connect with others who were going through the same experiences. Fiona Arthurson and Denise McCluskey became part of my village when I was raising my children, and Leeann Cairnduff and the unstoppable Janine Callanan lightened my load as I raised my children.

I have spoken a little bit, but not a lot, in the public domain about when my youngest child was three and not being able to afford to send her to an early childhood education setting. I did not have the financial capacity at that time. I had been able to send my older children to an early childhood setting, but I felt incredible guilt, and it was only through some generosity in my family that I was able to have the resources and the money to send children to an early childhood setting. This government's commitment to opening 50 new government-owned childcare centres across the state by 2028 will mean that other parents will not have to experience that guilt but will be able to give their children the best start in life. We know that no parent should have to choose between their children's education and the food on their plate and the clothes on their back. This is a typically progressive Labor piece of legislation that puts our early childhood educators and our children at the centre of what we do.

I arrived this morning to an invitation in my inbox from the Aspire Early Education and Kindergarten in Cranbourne West. The Aspire early education centre is a place that I have visited quite a lot. Last time I was there we had a terrific welcome to country from the local Bunurong mob, and the joy of so many children really socialising and learning how to connect with each other, so I was really very grateful this morning to receive an invitation from Erandathie Wagawattage to an event coming up on 14 March. I will be prioritising that. I always say how grateful I am to Archi Patel for the role as assistant director at Aspire.

I have got the Botanic Ridge Family and Community Centre; the Clarendon Street community centre; the Cranbourne Day and Kindergarten Centre, which is run by the unstoppable Judy Clarkson, who is a bit of a Cranbourne icon; Headstart Early Education in Clyde North; Fairhaven Kindergarten, where the kids are very well connected and looked after; the Marriott Waters family centre, which is right near my office; Selandra Kindergarten, where there are a lot of little legs running around; the Livingston kinder; Imagine Childcare and kinder; and Pebble Patch, where I spend a lot of time.

There is a lot of laughter, a lot of humour and a lot of care put into what we do in our community, but being somebody who represents a growth area I was also very, very pleased that I was able to identify that Cranbourne is going to be home to one of the bush kinders. To have that word come through from

the minister that Cranbourne is going to have access to those types of top-notch facilities is absolutely joyful for me as a local member, perhaps sometimes a way too parochial local member, but somebody who takes pride in the way our early childhood educators look after our kids' futures.

I am very much looking forward to heading down to the Mayone-bulluk kindergarten in Cranbourne West to see how that bush kindergarten takes shape and to watch how the children in Cranbourne West get to enjoy the pleasure and important educational outcomes that come from having park and bushland settings able to be provided for them right in the heart of our growing south-eastern suburbs. I know even the member for Berwick here will be aware of the extraordinary number of young children not just being born into our area but moving into our area as well.

Here we have typical Labor progressive reform, and the contrast to those opposite is always obvious. We get things done. We are moving very quickly towards this reform and towards making sure that we can introduce Best Start, Best Life. I know that the parents at Rangebank kindergarten as well are very focused on the needs of young people in the community – a place of great need. But I do know that having Best Start, Best Life, having this legislation and having the capacity to be able to provide supply secure employment – for union members ideally – will let educators get the rights and responsibilities of safe, secure and well-paid work. I am absolutely delighted that this is legislation that I have been able to make a contribution to.

I commend this legislation, and I also pay credit to not just those who work in the ministers' offices but also those public servants who work very hard to make sure that we have policy levers. There is a lot of hard work. I think it might have been the member for Preston who commented on the extraordinary amount of work that goes into reform. This is an area of great reform. There is no way that we are wasting a moment in getting action done to make sure that we can provide the best start in life to our children. I commend this bill, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:32): I am also delighted to rise today to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024, and it is even better to speak just after the hardworking member for Cranbourne and also to hear a proud mum, although looking after children in early childhood seems to have been a long time ago. In my case I will join her just to say little bit more. But how wonderful it is to be part of this Allan Labor government and also to stand on this side of the chamber to speak on this bill, knowing that we have so many educators here across the chamber, right from the member for Narre Warren South to the member for Mulgrave, and also yesterday we heard from the member for Frankston, who is also qualified and spent a lot of time as an educator.

I must confess Manette, my wife, has returned to work, and her first job after she returned to work about two months ago is as an early educator, after she completed her online studies for a bit more than one year. It is even better to see Sofia, known as Gucci by her older brothers, go to kindergarten at the same place where Manette works. I could not be prouder of Manette, my wife, and to see to see both of them come back home with big smiles day in, day out. That is just my short contribution about how proud I am as a father to see three-year-old kinder roll out and now again to be in this chamber to make a contribution.

This is another amazing bill and one that continues the Allan Labor government's support for our youngest Victorians. We are leading the nation here in Victoria on early childhood education and care, and we can see that clearly through our \$14 billion commitment to expand kindergarten programs across the state under our Best Start, Best Life reforms. We of course have heard so many contributions here from members about the 50 new government owned and operated early learning centres. It is an ambitious plan but one that is vital to address childcare shortages in the areas of greatest need. That need is present in my community and throughout south-east Melbourne.

I would also like to share, like the member for Cranbourne, about the young families that come from other parts of the world and call south-east Melbourne home. To see their youngsters attending early

childhood education makes it possible for the parents to focus on building up their new life here in Australia, in Victoria. So I am very happy to see that one of the 14 sites set to open in 2025–26 is the early learning centre in Noble Park in the electorate of my good friend the member for Mulgrave. Congratulations to Noble Park. It will be at Harrisfield Primary School, so obviously this is a co-located early learning centre. We have heard about the benefits that co-located early learning facilities may provide for our families – mainly easier access to early learning programs, simpler and more convenient drop-off times and of course a smoother transition from early learning programs to school for children. I cannot help but shout out to the Westall education precinct in my electorate. We know that the early learning centre there and also the kindergarten are next to a primary school. Also in that precinct is Westall Secondary. So right from the start there is kindergarten at Westall, primary school at Westall and then secondary also at Westall. It is such a wonderful thing to see, and we know for sure that this is the right thing to do.

Best wishes to all those children and families that start school this year. I hope that things are going well and wish everyone – students, teachers and families – a safe and happy year at school this year. Starting school is an exciting time but also can be a challenging time for families, so the added value of a co-located early learning centre in terms of helping with a smooth transition is also very valuable. I come back to the experience that I saw firsthand at Westall kindergarten, Westall Primary School and Westall Secondary, where the older sibling can pick up the younger one and all can walk to and from school.

Again, it is exciting to see new early learning centres are in train in many places. There are so many fantastic early learning centres in our community, and I am really looking forward to visiting a couple of them later this month. I will be heading to Springvale South Goodstart before the end of the month to meet the centre director, Jhumur Ravi, and I will also be heading to the Acacia Avenue Kindergarten for an exciting announcement on the same day. It is very exciting that Acacia Avenue Kindergarten in Mentone is one of the recipients of a Building Blocks inclusion grant, which is a fantastic result for the kinder and for the local community. There is over \$45,000 in support for an acoustic treatment for the three- and four-year-old kindergarten play space. That is really significant and something that we are looking forward to making sure that all children in the Acacia Avenue Kindergarten get the best start to life no matter their ability.

I am really hoping also to get to the Springvalley preschool in Springvale South in my electorate sometime in the near future. They are also a recipient of a Building Blocks inclusion grant. They have received \$120,000 for the development of the sandpit and cubby area to make those more accessible for children of all abilities. These are fantastic initiatives that this government is really proud to support, making sure that everyone has the facilities and equipment that they need for a great start in life no matter their ability.

We can see the commitment that this government has to offer in terms of early childhood education and care, leading the nation and delivering unprecedented investment in early childhood education services so our youngest learners have world-class local kindergartens where they can learn and grow. We have seen that investment in the Best Start, Best Life reform, a \$14 billion investment by the Labor government, transforming early childhood education to help children thrive, save families money and support parents, especially women, to return to work and study if they choose to. In my case, I have already confessed that my wife returned to work after completing her early learning pathway, and to see Sofia – Gucci – attending the kindergarten where my wife works is such a wonderful experience. We all grow together as a family.

Free kinder benefited more than 140,000 children last year, saving families up to \$2500 a year, providing much-needed relief for family budgets, and giving more women a choice to return to the workplace. With pre-prep we will be continuing to lead the nation in early childhood education and care over the next decade, with a new universal 30-hours-a-week program of play-based early learning for four-year-old children. Best Start, Best Life is a \$14 billion investment in our children and the future of our nation. I am extremely proud to support that investment and to support this bill here

today. I am extremely proud to be part of an Allan Labor government that continues to lead the nation in early childhood education and care. I commend this bill to the house.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:42): I rise to support the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. We know that 90 per cent of a child's brain development occurs in their first five years and that kids who start kinder at three get a head start in life. Last year the house passed the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Land Powers) Bill 2023 to provide for the acquisition, use and development of land for early childhood education and care and associated services. This bill is another crucial step in realising Labor's vision of Best Start, Best Life for every child in the state.

At the last election we committed to delivering 50 new low-cost childcare centres across the state in areas that need them the most, and I cannot tell you how proud I was to secure two of these in my electorate of Broadmeadows, one in Fawkner and one in Glenroy. Fawkner is one of the first to be delivered, and it was great to be at Moomba Park recently with the Premier and the minister to talk about this exciting program. This centre will be licensed for 130 kids to attend at a time, and it will also have community, meeting and playgroup spaces for local families to utilise. It will be conveniently co-located with maternal and child health services, because every family deserves local access to high-quality education and care no matter where you live or how much you earn.

Across all of the 50 government early learning centres we will have the opportunity to provide a range of associated services onsite, including allied health, parenting programs, family counsellors, toy libraries, maternal and child health services and other community spaces, making it easier for families to benefit from all the services that are available to them and also giving the community spaces to come together and socialise as we know how important that is, especially for newly arrived families and mothers, who can feel isolated. We have seen in Broadmeadows the success of the community hub model where newly arrived families learn English in one room and in the next room the kids are doing early learning and play-based activities. It gives them that sense of comfort and is a really good way for newly arrived families to get a feel for the education system here.

For many families in my electorate kinder is the first time kids interact with people outside their extended families. It is an opportunity to make lifelong friends, both for the children and their parents. This can help in establishing important social connections within the community and peer support for parents. I remember fondly my girls heading off to three-year-old kinder at Glenroy Memorial Pre-school, now part of the fabulous Glenroy Hub Children's Centre. They were expertly supported in their preschool learning by their dedicated teachers, including Tanya, Vivian, Angela and Janine. There was no funding for three-year-old kinder when our children were enrolled, and that meant that a whole lot of families were not able to access this fabulous resource. Thirteen years later, and the friendships that both my daughters and I were able to make are still going strong. Our children have grown into mature, responsible and capable learners, and I acknowledge the impact that the early years had on their future. Our kids not only enjoyed the play-based learning activities of painting, Play-Doh, dress-ups, outdoor play on the climbing frames, swings and bikes, but they also learned social skills that are critical for development. This government is ensuring that all kids have the opportunities that three- and four-year-old kinder provides and the high-quality and affordable child care for the communities that need it most.

I thank the government for its resolve to improve the lives of our young Victorians, especially in areas where we need the services the most. The 50 early learning centres will be located in communities where there is insufficient child care and areas that are experiencing high rates of disadvantage. The locations have been based on the current availability of child care or the existing supply in the communities, the estimated demand for child care in these communities and the level of disadvantage based on the socio-economic index. They will be targeted to locations to help meet the needs of communities that are currently facing shortages or are likely to face shortages in the near future. You can see the changing demographic, particularly of Glenroy and Fawkner. When you walk around now there are prams everywhere; story time at the library is full. I know there are waiting lists for child care

everywhere, so this will make a really big difference. It is an ambitious plan, but it is one that Victoria needs to be able to appropriately address the shortages in childcare facilities. I would like to thank the Minister for Children for her dedication to early childhood education and care and her incredible work in this portfolio, as well as the previous minister. I have had so many visits to local kinders with both ministers, and their office has provided constant support.

Early education is as important as primary and secondary school, and this government has taken concrete steps not only to recognise this but also to enshrine it in legislation. We know that for every dollar invested in early childhood education Australia receives \$2 back over a child's life through higher productivity and earning capacity and reduced government spending on health, welfare and justice. From tertiary education to the early years, Labor is doing what matters. Right across the state new kindergartens are being built, and existing services are being expanded to ensure they are accessible for all. As part of the 2023–24 state budget, the Victorian government invested \$1.2 billion for the kindergarten infrastructure projects required for the continued expansion of three-year-old kinder and the transition to pre-prep. We are delivering an over \$14 billion transformation in Victoria's early childhood sector through our nation-leading Best Start, Best Life reform. It is the biggest investment in the early years in our state's history and a huge step towards a brighter, more equal future for every Victorian family.

In my electorate alone over \$40 million has been invested into kinders: \$1.7 million for the Lorne Street kindergarten at Fawkner Primary School; \$1.6 million for the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre; \$1.6 million for Will Will Rook Preschool; \$1.47 million for Upfield Kindergarten at Dallas Brooks Community Primary School; \$1.4 million for York Street Kindergarten at Glenroy West Primary School; \$1.4 million for Glenroy Central Kindergarten; \$1.35 million for Holy Child Early Years Centre, and it was great to go there with the minister for early education at the time and see the fabulous facilities there; \$793,000 for Meadows Primary School Kindergarten, and that was actually the first of the community hubs, and it made such a difference to those families and the settlement of newly arrived families that it was replicated right around the state and is now replicated around the country; \$640,000 for Belle Vue Park Primary; \$542,000 for Dallas Kindergarten at Dallas Brooks Community Primary School; \$479,000 for Broadmeadows Preschool; funding for an extra 33 places at Oak Park Kindergarten; investments at Fawkner Kindergarten, Campbellfield Preschool and Westmere Children's Services Centre; and \$641,000 invested at Gowrie Victoria Broadmeadows plus an expansion which we recently announced there. Gowrie does an incredible job of supporting vulnerable families. I have been there a number of times with a number of ministers, and it really showcases what we can do and how we can change lives from an early age. It also has one of the best First Nations programs around, and it is definitely worth looking into.

The budget also provided \$48 million to support kinders and toy libraries to purchase equipment, support and expand the bush kinder program and create 10 new bilingual kinders; and \$18 million to strengthen and modernise existing inclusion support for children with a disability and additional needs. I cannot tell you how important it is for families to be able to access early years support and child care when they have a child with a disability. I have heard of many situations in the past where children with a disability have been excluded from childcare centres and the harm that does to the whole family. It was great to see the bush kinder grants locally; I was able to get to nine of those in my electorate. The bush kinder programs are fun and educational, and they let kids play in nature while learning and growing.

We are also helping to attract staff to the industry through incentives and scholarships. As I spoke about yesterday, the Kangan Institute's centre of excellence in health and community care will help train the next generation of early childhood workers as well as disability workers, healthcare workers and allied health workers. It is fabulous to have that in Broadmeadows, where we have got the workforce. To be able to train that up and help the government roll out the three- and four-year-old kinder across the state is great.

Under this government, we have made kinder free for three- and four-year-olds in the state for all participating families. This \$270 million initiative is saving up to \$2500 per family per child. Not only does this provide much-needed cost-of-living relief to young parents but it also allows women to return to the workforce. This year the program is anticipated to help approximately 140,000 kids across Victoria and provide over 28,000 Victorians with more flexibility in deciding to return to work. We are leading the nation in early childhood education and care, and that is something that we can be very proud of as Victorians.

In addition to this, Labor is also introducing the new, universal pre-prep program – 30 hours of play-based learning, fully funded. What a game changer that is – that is an incredible initiative that will just uplift everyone across the state. Thirty hours of free child care for every four-year-old is a critical step for parents who want to go back to work but cannot afford the childcare fees, but also for those social skills. I commend the bill – *(Time expired)*

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:52): It is great to rise on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. It was a bit of a shame to cut off the member for Broadmeadows in full flight. She probably would have done a better account of it than me, but I will give it my best shot. This area of reform is substantial for our state. It builds on an election commitment of the then Andrews government going into the 2022 election to build 50 government owned and operated early learning centres, a commitment that so many of us in government were so proud of, and it builds on a storied legacy of Labor governments at state and federal level investing in early childhood education, because it just matters to our kids and the next generation.

I remember that at one of the first briefings I had as Parliamentary Secretary for Schools I had the opportunity to meet with some of the legends who run our early childhood sector out of the Department of Education and Training. To hear that they could track whether a three- or four-year-old had had kinder education through to their teens and the difference in outcomes and how that sets up kids was really powerful. It has always stuck with me just how important it is for us to lean in and invest as much as we can in early childhood education to give our kids the very best start and the very best opportunities.

When we think about how much has been achieved in a decade of early childhood reform, it is really important to reflect on the hard-fought policy outcomes that this government has delivered, sometimes not opposed – which is one of the positions that, curiously, the opposition take on this with ambivalence or by attacking some of the funding and investment that has been made. We know that from the early childhood reforms in 2009 of the then minister Kate Ellis, under the leadership of Prime Minister Rudd, we had huge reform of early childhood through the universal access to 15 hours of four-year-old kinder. That has set up communities across Australia, who now have that opportunity. We know that some of the landmark reports and recommendations in the early 2000s and mid-2000s said that there was not a differentiation between three- and four-year-old kinder – you could get in earlier and it was a really important thing to do. It is one thing to have that as a policy; it is another to realise the challenges that you need to undertake to build up the capacity, to build up the workforce and the capital, and how you do that postcode by postcode across our state.

That is exactly what we have done over a decade. We have been upgrading kinders in communities across Victoria. We are seeing that across the City of Greater Dandenong, the City of Kingston and across the south-eastern suburbs all the way out to the growth corridors. It has been really remarkable to see how governments can deliver a policy outcome and see that investment achieved, knowing that the generational change and outcomes will happen. We might not see the benefits of that investment until another generation, but we know that the investments made today will have such transformational power for kids and those outcomes. We know that education is the greatest enabler for children – anything you can do as a state government or federal government. That is why we are investing in building the Education State from kindy all the way through primary and secondary and into TAFE and tertiary education. Why wouldn't you invest in this really important area?

The 50 early learning centres are a really important thing for our government to be committing to to deliver on that outcome and to invest in the workforce as well. This bill allows the Department of Education to have the necessary legislative powers to deliver those outcomes and the employment arrangements. One of the big elements in this story of early childhood reforms and the investment that has been made is the huge uplift in workforce. We need well over 10,000 new early childhood educators over the decade of these reforms. If anyone tuning in – the hundreds of thousands of Victorians that tune into Parliament each and every day to see us in action – is thinking, ‘What are we going to do into the future?’, choose early childhood education. It is one of the most amazing things that you can do.

I remember that, along with our Bayside Glen Eira Kingston Local Learning and Employment Network, we did an employment seminar effectively with education providers and leaders and students. There were a couple of students that had started on a trajectory thinking that they were going to do a bachelor of science or a bachelor of laws, but it was not their passion; it was not their calling. Not until they got an immersive experience in early childhood education did they realise, ‘That is my life purpose, that is my “why” in life and that is what I want to do.’ To hear those students describe their trajectory and how passionate they are to then be leaders in their particular early learning centre was amazing. These are the opportunities we are opening up for people, to lift their gaze and to see how they can be part of transforming their community and the outcomes for our youngest Victorians.

I have seen that this year as my little legend Orla goes into three-year-old kinder, that prekindergarten age. I have seen the benefits at Chelsea kinder with Paisley, who is in grade 2 now. The transformational element of three-year-old kinder and four-year-old kinder is just outstanding, and I give a big shout-out to all the early childhood educators who do such a wonderful job in our local community each and every day. We saw that particularly in the way they kept our little ones online during the pandemic with some of the video features they were doing, the adaptability, the changing nature of regulation and child safe standards and outcomes, the evolution of play-based learning and its development each and every year. It is a lot to pack in, and we thank them for all the work that they do in nurturing our youngest minds and Victorians.

Another key element of our work in the early childhood space is around free kinder. A lot of this is about cost of living, but it is also about getting people back to work and giving people the opportunity. We know care responsibilities are gendered. It is not from a lived experience that I see that but from those that tell me or have detailed to me in community what they go through. We see from all the stats that care outcomes for Victorians fall a lot to women. Through no fault other than having a family, so many in our community have their careers, their trajectories or just their balance in life and outcomes impacted. Free kinder is a workplace and workforce policy as much as it is a cost-of-living policy. It is to make sure that we are giving Victorians those options – the hours of kinder, money back in people’s pockets – but also supporting people back into the workforce if they choose to do that, giving that flexibility and opportunity. Some of the big childcare reforms we have just seen, where the threshold has been changed for childcare rebates, are also a really important element and a whole storied element of federal and state Labor governments always having the side of our youngest Victorians and the families that they come from, and supporting people into the future as well.

I want to also touch on another point around early childhood education. We know participation rates are something that we look really closely at in our early childhood space and the disproportionate impact on communities who are unable to access education. By providing free kinder, by providing that access, we ensure that people have more opportunities into the future as well, and that is a really lovely element. To make sure that in every single community free kinder access is an entitlement and a right for Victorians is really important as well. It will make sure that over the course of a child’s development and growth they are not left behind and that the cost of accessing early childhood education does not exclude people. That is one of the most wonderful elements of our reforms as well. It is a \$14 billion investment over nearly a decade. It is something that Victorians can all be really proud of. The commitments that have been made around the 50 early learning centres are just another

element of the work we are doing to make sure that early childhood education and its scale-up is accessible for all.

The final point I want to make is about pre-prep. Pre-prep is absolutely magnificent – 30 hours of the equivalent of four-year-old education. The now Minister for Planning and I, when we were the parliamentary secretaries for early childhood and schools, did a joint report for the minister on the transition from early years education to primary and how substantial that is. Any early childhood educators will know the transition statements they have to do to set their kids up as they transition into foundation. In that report we talked about how if we could do more to assist with that transition into the early primary years we should be doing it, while supporting the pedagogy of play-based learning up to the age of eight. This does that. The 30 hours of pre-prep is absolutely outstanding, and the scale-up, the investment and the aspiration around this are truly transformational. It takes a lot of work, and a lot of people thought three-year-old kinder was not possible to scale up, but now we see municipality after municipality scaling up their services. We see investments left, right and centre across our state being made. Pre-prep is really transformational.

There is a lot to talk about in this space. I am really proud of the next step in this bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (11:02): It is a great pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. That was certainly a mouthful. I want from the outset to just say a great thankyou to everyone who has worked on this bill. It is always a great day to be in the Allan Labor government when we are here in this place, the people's house, talking not just about education but particularly about early years education. We know it is so critical for government to be reforming, talking about and investing in early years education to make sure we are giving young people the very best start in life. I think we all have different ways of going about things, but I think we can agree in this place on that statement and making sure we set young people up for life.

The way that we do that is through reforms to the system. We have seen the reforms that this government has made, the Andrews and now Allan Labor governments. The reforms that we have made have been nation leading. We know they are nation leading because we look at all the other states who are now following on in our reforms. Of course there is the work that was done with the New South Wales government not too long ago. We now see other state governments, including Queensland, following in our footsteps with free kinder. I think they are calling it 'kindy' – that must be one of those scallops/potato cake type things. I do not know what they are called up in Queensland. It is too humid for me; every time you get off the plane it is like hitting a brick wall. Anyway, there are differences between Queensland and Victoria, but Victoria is absolutely leading the way when it comes to early years education.

I am very, very proud to be part of this government. I will of course get into some of that detail not just about this bill but more broadly about some of the local context and also the policies that our government is rolling out and has rolled out. It was fantastic to hear from previous speakers, including the member for Mordialloc. I always love to give a shout-out to the member for Mordialloc, talented member that he is –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: There is a bit of love, member for Point Cook, for the experience he has had and the depth of knowledge he brings not just in his professional role but from previously as the Parliamentary Secretary for Schools. Having worked alongside the member for Mordialloc, I understand his passion around education and the reforms that he was part of. You can clearly see them in the government.

I am very proud to call the member a good friend and to hear about his experiences and the importance of early years education, particularly as they apply to Orla and Paisley. Happy birthday to little Orla –

three? Happy birthday. So of course there will be three-year-old kindergarten now, then moving on to four-year-old kinder and then pre-prep. It is all happening for the member for Mordialloc, so it is always wonderful to hear him talk in this place about his passion for early years in government but also in his own household.

From the member for Broadmeadows, hearing her passion and hearing her insights on the importance of early years educators was a very interesting speech to listen to. The member for Cranbourne and I were just talking before, and I think one thing we can all share and one thing I know the member for Cranbourne did that I would like to do is to give a shout-out to all the early years educators and the early years staff, not just in the electoral district of Bayswater but right across Victoria. These are huge reforms, and this bill is another step in the right direction, another step in reforming the system and making sure we have got the platform and we have got the foundation – the base – to roll out what is the most significant early years agenda we have seen in this country ever. That does not happen without the staff, without the educators doing their work day in, day out. I know that most members – in fact I am almost certain all members who have spoken on this – have given a shout-out and acknowledged the early years staff, because without them it simply does not happen.

Every time I go out – I have got a number of early years facilities in my patch – my first reflection is that I just could not do that myself. It is an absolutely mammoth job. Having become a father recently to young George, I know many of our early years staff are also parents themselves. Being a family outside of hours but also having to take those skills and apply them, obviously in different ways as an educator, in the workforce is just an incredible task. I do not know how they do it. I am very grateful to each and every one of them, and I always love listening to their insights about not just what the government's reforms have meant to them but also ways that we can continue to improve. That is exactly what this government is doing – we are listening to our early years workforce. We are reforming the system. We are implementing changes to make their job easier but also to make the lives of Victorians easier.

This really, at the very heart of it, is also about addressing the cost of living and about getting people back into the workforce if that is what they choose to do. We know that our reforms in early years education – over 20,000 families, when we talk about programs like free kinder – give them more flexibility. Pre-prep and expanding three-year-old kindergarten will mean that women, predominantly, if they choose to and they want to get back into the workforce, will be able to do so sooner because they have got a government that has their back. And they have not just got a government that has their back in terms of making the transition back into the workforce easier for them, an easier choice – although still a difficult one, of course, no doubt – but we are also helping to put money back in their pockets. Free kinder is a very, very important reform that is putting, on average, \$2500 per child, per year – now \$2563 or thereabouts – back into the pockets of families. That is a significant cost saving.

The best hits of early years education and what this government is doing: we have got three-year-old kinder. That is now 15 hours in pretty much most places, and that is continuing to roll out. That is making a huge difference. We have got four-year-old kinder, which is now free, which is now transitioning over the next few years into that pre-prep program. We know that we have stood by early years educators. We started a lot of this work during the tumultuous times of COVID. We have also now as part of this bill particularly gone to the very heart of our mechanisms around ensuring we can start the rollout of those 50 early years centres, critically important in those areas that need it most, because this government is not just about the policy. We are not just about those capital reforms that are needed in communities right across Victoria that desperately need more early years centres; that is exactly what this government is doing. We do not just talk the talk but we walk the walk as well.

In my electorate we have done some fantastic work when it comes to addressing capital needs as well. We have delivered \$1.6 million for the new hub in Bayswater, a fantastic service that is pretty much a one-stop shop for everything early years related. That is a magnificent facility, delivered thanks to this Labor government. We have also delivered \$1 million for a new facility currently under construction that will be run by Goodstart, a fantastic not-for-profit organisation that has a number of early years

facilities in my part of the world. Notwithstanding that, there are indeed many, many others. That is looking like it is not far off being completed. And of course we have our free TAFE programs, which skill the workforce up, which makes it easier for people to choose what is a fantastic career for those who indeed want to choose it, and we know that there are more and more making that decision. This government's job is to absolutely stand by them, back them in and support them.

Lauren Kathage interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Absolutely, member for Yan Yean – back them up. Thank you for chiming in – much appreciated. Unfortunately we know that this is not the case for everyone. I do not want to focus on other people in state government. Unfortunately locally in my patch Knox council have made a decision recently to exit out of kinders, and I want to use this opportunity to place on record my disappointment in them getting out of kinder services. It will essentially mean that you will have other providers that are not from local government stepping in to provide services. We know that there are a range of different providers, but with councils it is very much a highly valued service that they have run.

Part of the conversation was that perhaps this is not core business of council. Well, if early years education and educating and setting our young people up for the best start in life is not part of your core business, then what is? We often hear the criticism that councils should be roads, rates and rubbish. Now, I do not believe it, because I think that statement is rubbish. But very soon, if councils keep getting out of these services, which absolutely matter and which make a difference in the lives of people in my patch – and right across, whether you are Labor, Liberal, Greens or whatever the case may be – then that statement is going to ring true. I was extremely, extremely disappointed. Our free kinder was guaranteed revenue, reducing the cost in the budget to them to under \$1 million per annum. Their own budget papers show this. We were backing them in. We had countless capital and Building Blocks grants, and yet they have made the decision.

However, our government is going to get on, continue to reform the system and make sure we have got our early years educators' backs. We are going to keep helping to build new facilities like these 50 early learning centres right across the state, and we are of course going to keep making sure we make it easy for Victorians to get back into the workforce. I support this bill.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (11:12): It is a delight to rise and speak on this bill. It is always a pleasure to follow the wonderful member for Bayswater, who brings such passion and energy to every debate. He speaks so quickly I wonder if his speeches have to be much, much longer. But he certainly is utterly committed, and it is always a delight to follow him.

I am very happy to rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. This is a really important bill in that it provides the necessary legislative framework for us to start to institute what was a commitment in the 2022 election. I remember when this commitment was made, and at that stage there was a commitment to have one of these 50 low-cost centres situated in what was then my electorate, the electorate of Buninyong. It is, however, now in the electorate of Ripon, and I am delighted that the wonderful member for Ripon will be able to be there and stand side by side with the community of Napoleons as they deliver one of these centres.

The centres really are aimed at making sure that there is good early childhood education in areas that need it the most, and I think that was a really important part of this commitment. Certainly the member for Bayswater commented on this as well. It is one thing for us to believe and to support, as we do, early childhood education, but what I love about this government is that we also make sure that it is accessible to the people that need it the most. This is targeted and thought through as a policy, and a lot of work was done to identify which communities really need that support. I look forward to seeing those roll out.

Of course, as many other speakers have mentioned so far, this is just another Lego block, if you like, in this government's absolute commitment to early childhood. It is nothing short of a revolution that this government has brought to this incredibly important space in the last few years. It comes back to that very basic understanding that those early years are incredibly important developmental years, so this government has really wrapped around families across Victoria to find ways to support every little Victorian to get the best start in life. That can be things like these 50 early learning centres, but the free kinder is just a revolution – a \$2500 saving for families per child. I am the mother of two boys. That would have been really helpful back in those days. They are a bit big now –

Jackson Taylor interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: Send them back to kinder? That is one way that we can support people in a time of high cost of living, but what I love about this government is the breadth of thought that goes into developing these ideas.

Another one that really hits home to me is the idea of putting these kinders in schools. I have done the mummy run – sorry, the daddy run – the parents' run. I have done the parental run where you have one kid at kinder and one kid at school and they are both due at the same time. Thankfully I lived in the small regional town of Ararat, so it was not too far to get from one side of town to the other. But for many people that is a really difficult time of day, so a simple idea of putting kinders in schools can absolutely change the lives of many, many families.

We have to stand back and say this government has revolutionised early childhood. I look to the other side, and the best they could do was to cancel Free Fruit Friday. This government likes to develop and move forward. Those on the other side like to cut things, but I think we all know that pretty well.

As I say, it has been a long time for me, but the change to having kinders in schools is going to be significant. I was really delighted to go to Ballan, which is a wonderful little town in my electorate. Ballan is going to have one such kinder co-located with the school. I talked to the principal about it, and he said from his perspective that the changes in kids transitioning are going to be huge as well. Not only does it benefit parents but it is also benefiting the teachers because these kids will have been co-located so when they start that first day in prep they will be much more comfortable. They will know the area; they will know where they are. As I say, I am really happy to have that in Ballan. I would say, 'Watch this space.' I am hoping there are many more to come in my electorate. I certainly know that the minister is working very hard to make sure that those new kinders are across the regions, because to me the regionality is utterly important.

But that is not where our commitment to these years stops. I was absolutely delighted to have the Minister for Children from the other place up in my neck of the woods just last week. She was there to announce grants for bush kinder. They are not huge grants, they are a few thousand dollars – but the difference that it makes to those kids. We were at a wonderful kinder, the Mount Helen early learning centre. It is in Ballarat. They are going to spend their money on gumboots and coats. The Yarrowee River runs across from the early learning centre, and they are going to be able to take those kids there. They have partnered with Fed Uni, they have partnered with the local Friends of Canadian Corridor group and they are going to get the kids out there and get their hands dirty. It is a wonderful, wonderful program. It was lovely to have the minister with me. She also visited the Perridak Burron Early Learning Centre. This is an amazing centre in Ballarat. It is run by BADAC, which is the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, and they have three services that they provide for the community. There is one just for Indigenous kids, and there are two which are open to all kids but with an emphasis on understanding First Nations people and their culture.

They are beautiful centres when you get in there – the earthy colours and all of the things that they teach. I would like to give a particular shout-out because the Perridak Burron Early Learning Centre won the inaugural Aunty Rose Bamblett Koorie Early Years Legacy Award. This is an award that acknowledges Aunty Rose, who was an absolute leader in First Nations early childhood education.

We have got these three centres: Yaluk Burron, Yirram Burron and Perridak Burron. ‘Burron’ means ‘children’, so we have River Children, Morning Children and Platypus Children, and they are absolutely beautiful centres. We have the wonderful minister at the desk, the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, who I believe is coming to visit us very soon in Ballarat – I was not sure if I was allowed to say next week – and I am looking forward to it. I think that is one of the things we are going to be talking to BADAC about, these wonderful centres. I know that the minister will be delighted to hear about this important work.

The bill really is about facilitating employment. The clue is in the name: I belong to the Labor Party. One of the things we really care about is workers rights and conditions. What is wonderful here is that this bill will absolutely enshrine that government early learning centres will offer fair wages and conditions that are consistent with established industry benchmarks. Government ELCs have access to the same Victorian kindergarten workforce supports that every other early learning centre does.

This is an incredibly important bill. It is about our absolute revolution in early childhood, but it is also about protecting and supporting the extraordinary workforce that stands behind this revolution. They are the people – we put our children in their hands. We trust them. They need to be able to trust us, and with this bill they know they have a government that stands with them.

Darren CHEESEMEN (South Barwon) (11:22): It is with some pleasure that I rise to make my contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. I must say I do this with my Labor colleagues with a very strong commitment to and passion for the future of the state of Victoria. We recognise in the Labor government, and indeed in the labour movement, the productivity-enabling power that comes from investing in early education and in education – whether it be school-based or TAFE or indeed university education – to unlock the productivity and potential of the state of Victoria and every single family and individual that exists. Education is a great enabler. It empowers people; it gives people the opportunity perhaps to step above and beyond where their parents potentially got. That is why we are so committed to making the investments that we have been making as the Andrews Labor government, and now the Allan Labor government, into our education.

Indeed when you look across the Australian continent, when you see Labor in government – it does not matter which jurisdiction – you see those investments being made in every single corner of the state of Victoria and indeed every single corner of Australia. We very much see the potential and the opportunity to make those investments. That is why my colleagues have been so successful in lobbying. At the end of the day we believe in it, our cabinet believes in it, our education ministers believe in it and our early education and training ministers believe in it, and that is that investment is so very important.

For a whole bunch of reasons, not every family gets the same opportunity to access education. Indeed that is very much the case with early education. That is why we took to the people of Victoria over the last year or two a commitment to deliver in parts of the state where historically the private sector has failed. We recognise the power of government intervention to empower those communities where the private market has historically failed.

I certainly know about, as do my colleagues, because we of course do actively engage with our educators in our own communities and we indeed do engage with the key education stakeholders in this state, and we very much recognise their contributions to our families and to our communities, and the work they do is so very, very critically important. As I have said, at times the private sector, the private marketplace, will fail, and in the context of this bill we are stepping in where there has been that failure and we are directly intervening and providing support to 50 communities where we know that without our intervention there would be no offering, no policy solution, no opportunity for mums and dads to get back into the workplace because there is no available service for their families. I am so proud that we have stepped up and intervened in this way. Of course there is a significant list of the

kinder services and the childcare services that we are going to support this year, next year and into the years to come.

In my context, in my seat, I have a very significant number of educators that live within my community who of course work across the broader Geelong and Surf Coast regions. I have the opportunity to talk to them in their workplaces and I have the opportunity to talk to them when I am out and about in my community at local sports clubs or when I am doing street stalls, and I have heard and taken the opportunity to listen to them describing their work and describing how their work impacts kids and families. I do want to, like a lot of my colleagues, just take that opportunity to thank them.

In terms of this particular bill, this bill does a number of things to ensure that the Secretary of the Department of Education has invested in them the necessary legal powers to ensure that they can go about employing people to deliver these important services to this important part of the economy. This will enable the secretary of the education department to employ teachers and all of the other staff that are important to the delivery of these services.

Again, when I think about my five years that I have been in this place I think I have spoken more on education than on any other topic I can think of. Early on it was our reform agenda in the TAFE space. More recently it has been our reform agenda by adding additional courses to the free TAFE list. I have had the opportunity to speak about the budget successes in my community with respect to funding modernisations of existing schools and indeed funding new schools for Geelong's growth corridor that sits within my seat.

We have been a big reforming government when it comes to education. The investments have been significant, and that is making a real difference, particularly to working Victorians – those that often do not have the means to make other choices with respect to their education, often as a consequence of the type of work they themselves might do and where they fit in. Education is a great enabler. Giving young people the best opportunity, no matter what choices their parents can afford to make, is so important. Every single dollar we invest in our education system comes back to us tenfold as a society, because that individual will be more productive, they will be happier, they will be able to participate in our economy and in our society in the fullest way that they can through the enabling that comes from that education. That is why we will continue to make those investments.

I have no doubt that in the years to come – as our state continues to grow, as population shift continues to happen, as we continue to see more challenges and more opportunities – a government like us with the ambition that we have will see us continue to strive and invest in education. I am so pleased that we have brought this bill to this house at this important time to unlock the opportunities in these 50 communities, to set up that legal framework and to get on with giving every single family, no matter where they are, the options that they need to set their kids up for a happy and productive future. I commend this bill to the house, and I look forward to its speedy passage.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (11:32): It gives me great pleasure to rise this morning and make my contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. Indeed this policy builds on the Allan Labor government's flagship \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms. It is a policy that at its core delivers free early childhood education to those that most need it as well as 50 brand new, government-run early learning centres in communities that need them most – communities like my community of Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing, communities like my community of Wyndham and indeed many outer suburban communities with exploding child populations, and communities with exploding child populations that the private sector has been unable to cater for. It is the role of good government to intervene in the market when we need to, to intervene in the market when there is a critical, essential service that is not being met by the private sector. That was absolutely the case in early childhood learning.

You have heard many speakers before me and indeed you have heard many speakers prior to today speak about how incredibly important education is in those formative years. There is a whole host and

raft of research that points to the fact that children that have access to both three-year-old and four-year-old kinder go on to have better results and an easier start to their schooling life than those that do not. In Victoria we believe that every child, irrespective of their parents' pay cheque, irrespective of their relationship to power and irrespective of their geographical circumstances, deserves the absolute best start to their education. This bill that we are debating today builds on our existing commitment to do exactly that.

Our Best Start, Best Life reforms are fundamentally about education, but they go far further than that. We are in the middle of inflationary pressures that we have not seen in this country for some time. I remember five, six years ago, when my children were attending four-year-old kinder, the cost that that put on the family budget. These reforms go such a long way to alleviating some of that cost-of-living pressure for Victorian families. For communities like those I represent that are experiencing negative cash flow on a weekly basis, that cost-of-living relief is so incredibly important. To know that the pressure of making sure that your child or children get the best start to their educational life without having to do it on a credit card, without having to borrow money, without having to put further pressure on that weekly budget is something that is incredibly special, and I know that families in my electorate that have enrolled their children in free kinder are so incredibly appreciative of this enormous reform.

The community of Tarneit, the electorate of Tarneit, as I have said before, have been incredibly lucky. I should not say lucky, but they have really benefited from Victoria continuing to be the Education State. We have opened four new schools in the last two years, and we will open a new school next year as well, but our commitment to early childhood learning has also been so incredibly significant. We have spoken about co-locating kinders and early childhood learning centres within schools in Victoria. It is just an incredibly sensible thing to do. Why former governments did not do more of it I will never know. Obviously saving time every single morning and saving time every afternoon on pick-up and drop-off is something that is really convenient for families. My electorate is no different. The Minister for Education and I opened Wimba Primary School only a few weeks ago, and there is the Wyndham Vale Primary School Kindergarten. Davis Creek Primary School also has a kindergarten, and they have been lucky enough to get a \$6000 grant for bush kinder as well, just like the member for Eureka was speaking about earlier. It gave me great pride to attend Davis Creek, with principal Philip Fox, to announce that. Riverdale North Primary School, which will be opening next year, will have a kindergarten added to it as well. Good News Lutheran College received a \$2 million grant from the Allan Labor government for a co-located kindergarten on their site.

As I have said, these reforms are fundamentally about early childhood learning, but we have also spoken about cost of living, and the member for Mordialloc rightly pointed out that this amendment also goes to workplace reform. Our early childhood educators form one of the most important workforces that we have in this state to get our kids off to the best educational start. But with these reforms and with more early childhood learning centres out there, we also need to increase our workforce. This bill goes to doing just that. It will amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to provide the state with the necessary legislative powers to operate early learning centres in Victoria as part of our reforms. The bill will also expand the overall scope of the act in matters relating to early childhood education and care and create a new government workforce under the act. In my opinion, it will also be incredibly good for workers to be employed in the government sector rather than by private day care centres.

The bill will provide the Secretary of the Department of Education with the appropriate powers to employ and manage the early learning workforce that will provide early childhood education and care at the government centres. In addition, the bill will also provide for the payment of fees for attendance at government early learning centres and make other necessary minor amendments to support the delivery of programs at those government centres. As I said, these flagship reforms are so important to give Victorian kids the best start to their education that they can have. We are delivering 50 new centres where we need them most – places like Tarneit and the outer suburban growth areas, which the private sector and the market have failed to keep up with previously. Our government is happy to

intervene in the market for something that is so incredibly important for Victorian kids. I commend the bill to the house.

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (11:42): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (11:43): I rise today to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. I would like to first highlight the fact that I know that this government is very good – very, very good – at putting politics before community safety, and here is another example.

It is primary, when you talk about the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill, that this bill, which is 35 pages long, has one line in relation to machetes but still manages to be called ‘the machetes bill’. It is pure politics from a government that has failed to do what they need to do when it comes to community safety and machetes on our streets. And while I get told I am petty from someone in the gallery who decides it is a good idea to say I am petty about this, we cannot forget that the Liberals have already tried to introduce legislation to ban the machete here in Victoria.

We have already put forward a bill that was opposed by Labor. At the time, the member for South Barwon said:

... what we see constantly, time after time, every single week, are juvenile political stunts from those on the other side. At every opportunity they seek to frustrate the government on the agenda that we took to the Victorian people and that was endorsed by the Victorian people.

It is interesting that all of a sudden, even though you did not take that bill to the Victorian people, you now want to reintroduce a bill that we brought forward to protect Victorians in 2023. But, no, you wanted to wait until 2024. The member for Laverton said:

... to bring before this house a proposed bill at the, I dare say, eleventh hour, in the last sitting week for this year. It cannot be seen as anything else than a political stunt ...

...

... What I find so outrageous is that it is a bill that is being proposed and debated as part of a procedural debate at the eleventh if not 12th hour here in 2023. It is an absolute disgrace to stand here and not have what I consider a really serious debate and conversation about these things. People have been seriously injured.

...

... This is nothing other than a political stunt by those opposite.

Interesting that they wanted a serious debate and then they opposed the opportunity to have the debate in 2023, when machete crime was at its highest, when aggravated burglaries went above 5000 in a year in this state, up from 2000. We continuously hear the government talking about those crime stats and going, ‘We’re just returning to those pre-COVID levels.’ Well, they are actually more than double those pre-COVID levels when it comes to assaults and when it comes to aggravated burglaries in our state. The member for Greenvale said:

I rise to oppose the member for Berwick’s motion not because the issues that the motion addresses are insignificant or unserious but because the motion itself is fundamentally unserious and another stunt, as the

member for Laverton said. The reason I oppose the motion is because the issues warrant more consideration than just a slanging match and gratuitous interjections from people like the member for South-West Coast and those on the opposition front bench in front of me, because the issues really matter: the home invasions that have been experienced in the member for Brighton's electorate, which the member for Caulfield discussed, and the issues that the member for Laverton discussed.

I say that these issues were important then and they are important now. What is worse is this government then brings forward a bill, a lot of which we support around the firearms prohibition orders, around machetes that unfortunately does nothing. They have come forward and said, 'How good are we? Pat us on the back. We're banning machetes.' But they are not. There is zero change in this bill that will impact the sale of machetes here in our state. There is zero impact from this legislation that will make any change when it comes to what is happening with machete crime here in our state.

We have gone and sought what currently is a machete by definition here in Victoria. A machete, being a bladed-edge weapon, is by its very definition a knife, and a knife with a blade that long would be a controlled weapon. If it is a controlled weapon, it cannot be sold to anyone under 18 years old, you must have a reason to have it, and there are conditions around having that weapon. The government is now moving to make a machete a controlled weapon. So I thought to myself, 'Who would I ask for an explanation of that?' Well, I would ask the minister, because the minister knows what they are talking about – we get that. And the minister has said moving 'machete' into the Control of Weapons Act 1990 rather than as a knife changes nothing. That is in his second-reading speech: it changes nothing. So a knife that could not be sold to someone under 18 last year cannot be sold to someone under 18 next year. A machete in the same circumstances, which could not be sold to someone under 18 last year, cannot be sold to them next year. And the reasoning the government gave for putting the machete into the Control of Weapons Act and making it a controlled weapon is because some people may not understand that a machete is a weapon. I had to clarify just to double-check it, but that was definitely what they said: some people would not understand that it is a weapon.

Let me assure you, Victoria Police know it is a weapon. They know 100 per cent that a machete is a weapon. If we are worried that a salesperson or a market stallholder at the Dandenong Market who is selling 20 machetes every week does not understand it is a weapon, then the policing of it is an issue, not the actual legislation. And if we are genuinely concerned about those machetes being sold at places like the Dandenong Market, what is this piece of legislation going to do to fix that? Zero, because next year you will still be able to sell a machete at the Dandenong Market.

However, if the government, instead of playing their political stunts, opted to support the legislation that the Victorian Liberals and Nationals put forward, it would be a prohibited weapon, and a prohibited weapon by very definition cannot be bought by anyone without exceptional circumstances. Think of a gun – you can still have guns in Victoria if you are a farmer. You should still be able to have a machete in Victoria if you are a farmer and you need it for your cane or your crop, but you should not need a machete if you are walking down the street or walking along the Yarra River. There is no reason in Melbourne to carry a machete along the Yarra River. By definition, at the moment, if you are over 18 and you have a reason in your mind for it, you can get away with it. Why wouldn't we give the police the powers by making this a prohibited weapon? Also, for those that fear it could be sold at the markets, if you make it a prohibited weapon, you can longer import it. A person therefore could not import bulk amounts of machetes to sell at the markets, and it would put a lot of restrictions around where they can be sold.

I think everybody in here saw the news when Channel 7 went in and purchased from Anaconda a machete for \$89. When they did that at the time, they said they walked in – no questions asked, no identification – and bought a machete. Under the changes the government is making, if Channel 7 returns to the same Anaconda in January 2025, they will be able to walk in and buy a machete. They will be able to do exactly the same then as they are doing now. Why? Because the government has failed to address the actual issue. They have failed to make a change that is going to genuinely impact on community safety.

Why has this come about? If we look back, we can go back to 23 June 2022: ‘Young man repeatedly stabbed in savage machete attack by hooded thugs in Springvale, Melbourne’. A 23-year-old was out with his friends in Melbourne’s south-east when he was attacked by thugs who were carrying machetes. They were carrying, by very definition, a controlled weapon. If it was a prohibited weapon, it would not have been able to be sold in most locations in our state and it would have been very difficult to get in metropolitan areas at the time. The young man was stabbed and stomped in this vicious machete attack in the south-east, and Victoria Police were hunting those that did it. I think the graphic part about that, which we have seen, is the footage that came from that attack. This is one of the pieces of footage that I would expect every person in this Parliament to have a look at to see the impact of what is happening when it comes to knife crime here in Victoria.

Look at the footage where people are in their house, in their own home, when groups of thugs are coming in and confronting them with a machete in their house. It not something that any person in here, unless they have experienced that, could absolutely understand. It is happening too often. The scary part now is that we are seeing more and more footage because more and more people feel insecure in their own homes and are now putting cameras at their houses. This is not me saying it, this is fact. Go and speak to any person who sells cameras here in our state and installs them in people’s houses. They are busier than ever because people are genuinely afraid, particularly in some of those areas. I know it was mentioned by the member for Brighton, but it is also down through Berwick. The other night we had two again in Alira estate. People in those estates are genuinely scared of what is going on.

We can go back to when a *Herald Sun* investigation called for bans of the lethal weapon. What was called for in an article written on 24 September 2023, prior to us coming in with our legislation, was:

An immediate ban on the sale of machetes in Victoria is needed to stop status-seeking teens using them in terrifying attacks, says a high profile youth worker.

Les Twentyman said they were deeply terrifying, these edged and terrifying weapons, and slammed the state government as ‘gutless’ for not taking a harder line on machetes.

Les Twentyman, who we all know and we all respect and who has done a lot of work particularly around knife crime, is calling for a ban. This ban that is going to be put into the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to stop machetes being sold to under 18-year-olds is already in place because it is there. What we are saying is, although it would be prohibited from everyone, it is that 18- to 24-year-old cohort that is a problem. They are still in that youth crime stage of life. We have a group of young offenders in that 18- to 24-year-old cohort that will still be legally allowed to buy a machete. No matter how anyone else tries to word it, it is exactly as it says here from Mr Twentyman:

“No one should be able to do that, no matter their age,” Mr Twentyman said.

“Machetes should only be available to buy for their intended purpose, cutting cane in Queensland.”

I cannot understand why this government would not be listening to someone like Les Twentyman, who has done so much. I cannot understand how they can continue to see the horrors of what happens when we have machete attacks on the streets and continue not to understand the impact when kids continuously want to buy the bigger knife to be the tougher person.

The Deputy Premier and I have had this discussion in the past. There is a book called *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*. If you have not read it, I encourage you to read it, because it goes through what happened in New York in the days when the fights on the streets were with the fist and the retaliation was with the fist. Over time the next group, who wanted to be bigger and tougher, came back with a stick. Then to defend the stick they brought the knife, and finally they ended up with the guns, and we have seen that gun crime in America is out of control. I am not saying that here in Victoria, by any stretch of the imagination, we are heading down a pathway of guns like that. I think we are a lucky and sensible state, a lucky and sensible country, in that we have had bipartisan support for gun control across our country. That will put us in a much better position moving forward than what would happen and did

happen in New York. If you are removing the gun, what you are putting in place – whilst there are groups of young people that try and continue to increase that crime and increase the visibility of what they have got – is you have gone from a knife to a machete. Again, we need to speak to those out there and listen to those that have seen what has been happening with this and what has been happening in our state, and we need to listen to those that are on the street talking about it.

It is not just Les Twentyman. There are so many out there that have been calling for inquiries in relation to this. The Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police Shane Patton told an inquiry he was speaking to that Victoria Police had been monitoring 600 members of 40 youth gangs and that cops already apprehend a lot of people under the Control of Weapons Act. It is already in place, by admission of the chief commissioner. Police can use this legislation to arrest someone under a Control of Weapons Act contravention, but the government's response is to put this into the Control of Weapons Act when it is already being used and has not been successful. Again, what we should be saying, and exactly what the chief commissioner says, is a young person cannot be carrying around a machete in public, because there is no reason for it. We say no person should be carrying around a machete in public, because there is no reason for it. I go back to what Les Twentyman said: a machete should only be used for its intended purpose, which is cutting cane in Queensland. We need to be ensuring that that is the case; that is where we want it to go.

The other people we should be speaking to about this are those that are the victims of these home invasions at night. I encourage everybody – it is not hard – to type into Google. You will end up with hundreds and hundreds of stories such as this one:

INTRUDERS broke into a Mount Clear home and hacked one of its occupants with a machete after a dispute on social media, a court has heard.

Lachlan Dzesa, 20, was supported by many friends and family as he pleaded guilty to home invasion at the County Court in Ballarat on Tuesday.

The reason I have raised this one, which occurred on 15 April 2023, is that these crimes are not just metropolitan: these crimes are across the state. I think we need to understand, if we are going to be making these changes, it is already difficult enough for Victoria Police to do what they are doing with the lack of numbers they have got – they are down 3 per cent on their current numbers and have a thousand vacancies.

What we do need to be doing is making sure they have got the powers to deliver, take these machetes off the street, arrest people when needed and make sure they can be formally charged, everywhere across the state. Recently I have been in Bendigo and I have been in Mildura where I have been talking about some of the crimes that have been happening up in those areas, and there are so many in the community that are genuinely concerned about some of the things that have been happening up there. But it is when you get articles like on 25 November in the *Herald Sun*, which said that Sunshine was a danger zone and that cops knew the railway station was a knife crime hotspot well before the killing of Pasawm.

So a young guy has died, and Victoria Police knew that this was already a hotspot. Under the control of weapons and prohibited weapons legislation to do searches et cetera they obviously have to have a declared area, but we know with machetes that it is a lot harder to hide a machete than it is a standard of old flick-knife from when I was kid or a pocketknife. You can hide them quite easily. It is very difficult to hide a machete. When we know these issues are happening and we know that we want to search these people as often as possible in those areas to ensure we can protect the community, we need to also understand that we need legislation so the police are 100 per cent confident that what they are doing is going to be backed by law. By the very admission of the minister, that is just not the case at the moment. Maybe that is a government issue, where the government maybe should just have put out a statement – it might have been a lot easier – just to let everyone know a machete is a knife and a knife is a controlled weapon. It would have been a lot easier than coming in here and calling an entire

bill the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill to make themselves look good and pat themselves on the back.

An internal police document from January released to the *Herald Sun* under freedom-of-information laws revealed a spate of weapon offences had occurred at the station and warned:

... there is a likelihood that violence or disorder will recur.

Obviously that violence ended up being the death of a young man at that spot. The document revealed there were 10 serious weapons offences at the station in the year between January 2022 and January 2023. Officers seized 18 knives, three machetes and a screwdriver in that period. Just to clarify that, a screwdriver is a dangerous article, a machete is not a dangerous article but a controlled weapon, so they have the ability to do that, but we need to make sure that a machete is not effectively classified in that same area or anywhere near it. A machete should not be available. So the police were warned of this, and I would assume that if the police had been warned about this in briefings from them the minister had been warned. I am assuming the minister was aware that there are issues around knife crime here in our state. If he was not, then I would probably strongly suggest that we may need a new minister. But if he was aware of that and during the 12 months did nothing, it was a bit steep for the government then to come out and say that the Victorian Liberals and Nationals were doing a stunt in 2023 by introducing a bill to stop this happening on our streets, because we are very, very keen to make sure that we want no machetes on our streets.

I will give you a quick rundown of just the Sunshine train station alone: 16 March 2022, three offenders, one armed with a knife, chased a male riding on an e-scooter; 26 March 2022, two offenders, one holding a knife, punched a victim who was sitting in their car; March and April 2022, recklessly causing serious injury, but the details were withheld; 24 April 2022, a person slapped their former partner across the face before pulling a knife on them and trying to stab them; 20 June 2022, ex-partner held a knife to their partner; 30 September 2022, a male held a machete to a PSO before fleeing and throwing the weapon away and being arrested; 25 September 2022, male armed with a knife followed a victim before demanding their watch; 17 October 2022, offender pulled out a knife and demanded the victim hand over their phone, poking them with the knife; dates unknown, armed robbery – details withheld; and 13 January, offenders held a box cutter to the victim and demanded the victim's money and phone. In a 12-month period that is the amount of knife crime at one – we have got to get this right; one – railway station here in Victoria. What we are seeing more and more is, despite people coming out and speaking about this, this government has brought in a piece of legislation to do nothing, to not change a thing. I quote:

The grandmother of slain schoolboy Ethan Hoac says she is “troubled for young boys” as she mourns her grandson, the latest victim of a scourge of knife crime in Melbourne.

Ethan's grandmother ... described the 14-year-old as “kind” and “funny”, adding he was loved by many.

“He was a really kind boy, really funny, a fun person to be around,” Thu said of her grandson.

“He had many friends who loved him, you can see that here today.

“I love him, he loved me. I'm so sad to see him go. I watched him grow up.”

These are the words of a grieving grandmother who suffered the loss of her grandson at the hands of knife crime here in Victoria.

When anyone turns around and says to me, ‘The Liberals and Nationals are running a scare campaign’, I ask them to have a read through the articles that are available through every single media outlet in our state. I ask them to go and look at channels 7, 9 and 10 and the ABC, any of those networks or, worse, look at what we are seeing on social media, which is absolutely horrific. We are all on social media now. The crimes that are coming through on social media are dares between these young crooks as to who can put the worst and most offensive crimes online, and that is scary. It is simply scary. What starts off, like one in Mildura, with a young girl being harassed in Hungry Jack's, then leads to her being beaten up down the street whilst being filmed. We see films of people using knives and

threatening others with knives. We have seen films of people using machetes and abducting kids on our streets, and they think it is cool. They try and outdo each other. They try and prove that 'I am better than you' by committing a more violent crime and it leads to death on the streets. It leads to people doing armed robberies in massive groups.

I have spoken to young offenders who were doing time in detention, and I have spoken to offenders who are out of the justice system. They will tell you that the very system they have gone through fails them. The opportunities available in youth justice these days have declined drastically. They are struggling to keep the youth justice system safe, and we are seeing it with continuous reports about what is happening throughout our justice system and with Cherry Creek, where it is out of control. Parkville College can no longer run courses at Cherry Creek because the teachers do not want to go down there. They are genuinely afraid. I have spoken to people working in that system where the kids at the moment have had weapons, and they are genuinely afraid. The amount of resignations is horrendous.

If we want to fix this system, number one, it is not just bringing in a bill with the word 'machetes' in brackets. It is fixing the youth justice system so we give those offenders genuine opportunities. Everyone knows I am far from being the person who says lock them up and throw away the key, but we must get control of our system to make sure that the system is in place. We must. We must make sure that young people have an opportunity to get better in that system. When they come out they should be in one of three positions: ready to go back to work, ready to re-engage with the education system or ready to go into the services that they most desperately need. That is why today I am going to move a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted following stakeholder consultation on what effect classifying a machete as a prohibited weapon would have on protecting the public against the use of machetes, while ensuring the bill retains the important changes to the service of firearm prohibition orders.'

It is vital we go back out there and speak not just to the community and the victims but to the experts in the system, to the academics who can tell us what is wrong within the system, to those working in the youth justice system, to the courts and to the offenders.

Let us start speaking to some of these young kids. Why? What is driving them to continuously increase the size of the knife? How can we work with them so we can get those knives off the streets? But first and foremost we must as a Parliament act to protect the Victorian community by prohibiting machetes here in Victoria. We must make machetes a prohibited weapon. They should not be on the street.

Members interjecting.

Brad BATTIN: I note the member for Monbulk did say they are. You are making them a controlled weapon, which they already are. The minister said that specifically in his second-reading speech. That is why no-one has questioned me and yelled out at me – it is your own speech that says it. I cannot believe a minister would come in here knowing the knife crime we have in this state and say, 'I'm going to not do anything.' I just do not understand it. I do not understand how anyone could then get up and back that. I say: if you want to put politics aside, then support the reasoned amendment and let us do what is right. Let us make sure that we can get machetes off the street.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Brad BATTIN: The member for Mordialloc, machetes are on the street in my community every day of the week, so let us prohibit them. If we can get machetes off the street and stop them being sold at Dandenong market, that will make a change. That is not politics, that is making sure machetes are out of the hands of young people who are – not guessing – killing people on the street. They are threatening people on the street. They are coming into people's homes with them.

I say to Labor: for once, instead of calling me out for a stunt or whatever stupid crap you want to do, do the right thing. Stand up for Victorians and let us protect those that are sitting in their home at the moment where someone is going to come in with a machete. Let us protect the families in Alira estate who this week had kids come through their home with a machete. Get the machete off the streets. The way to do that is: do not listen to me, listen to Les Twentyman. This is a man who has continuously campaigned on this. Get listening to Les Twentyman, who wants these knives banned, and not just from those under 18; they already are. He wants them banned from every single person here in Victoria. Let us put machetes back to what they should be: a tool used in Queensland for getting rid of sugarcane, not a weapon on the streets. Anyone else on that side who wants to say they are not, I refer you back to those incidents that have happened at one railway station here in our state. I implore people to support our reasoned amendment to ensure that we can consult and get this right rather than waiting for more kids to die here on Victorian streets.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:13): I think it is always very important when speaking to legislation to go to the purposive rationale behind the bill. Of course what underpins this bill is assisting our very hardworking Victorian police to keep our community safe. It is a pity the member for Berwick left out swathing chunks of the bill to zone in on one tiny element. We are seeing that the opposition –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: No, no, no, it is important, but let me get to this: it is a significant element, but he left out –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Order! I would like everyone to just calm down. I would like to listen to the contribution. There is too much audible noise in the chamber. If you want to have a conversation, take it outside.

Nina TAYLOR: The point is that swathing chunks of the bill have not been spoken to as yet, and I am very happy to speak to those. The bill will crack down on organised crime and weapon sales by making it easier for police to serve firearm prohibition orders – that is a very important element of the bill – ensuring there is no doubt that a machete is a controlled weapon.

First of all, I also think that it is important to note that stakeholders were consulted in the development of these reforms, including, none the least, Victoria Police, IBAC, Victoria Legal –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Order! I have warned this chamber once. I cannot remove people – that is not up to me – but if I have to call the Speaker back, I will. Enough – I would like to hear the contribution.

Nina TAYLOR: Stakeholders consulted in the development of these reforms include Victoria Police, IBAC, Victoria Legal Aid, the Commission for Children and Young People, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus policy and legislative change collaborative working group, the Magistrates' Court, the Children's Court and the Victorian Firearms Consultative Committee, just to allay some of the concerns of the opposition, who conveniently overlooked those elements in the preparation of the bill. Fundamentally what we are seeking to do with this bill is to ensure the firearms industry operates safely and we keep firearms out of the wrong hands.

I will go to some of the objections with regard to the machete element. Why are we amending the Control of Weapons Act 1990? At the end of the day that is a key purposive element of this bill. It is because some people in the community do not consider machetes to be knives but instead consider them to be tools. Victoria Police has identified that some retailers, including market stallholders and wholesalers, do not consider machetes to be knives. For this reason restrictions on the sale of controlled weapons to individuals under the age of 18 years are not being fully complied with. Whilst it is true

that machetes are used as tools for various legitimate purposes, including horticultural, agricultural and general-purpose activities such as clearing brush and cutting and maintaining trails, they are nonetheless knives.

Further, why should a machete not be reclassified as a prohibited weapon? A machete has a longstanding status as a knife and has many legitimate uses in the community. There is no need to reclassify a machete as a prohibited weapon because it is already appropriately regulated. Any proposal to reclassify a machete to be a prohibited weapon would require a detailed regulatory impact analysis and would be likely to impose a significant regulatory burden –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Order! I will ask the chamber again. Member for Berwick, you have had your say. Member for Nepean! And there is still too much audible noise in the chamber.

Nina TAYLOR: It would be likely to impose a significant regulatory burden on many sectors of the public who legitimately use machetes for lawful purposes.

Coming to other key elements of the bill that have not even been touched on to this point in time, I did want to speak to the element of the changes to the firearm prohibition orders, noting that the firearm prohibition order scheme was inserted into the Firearms Act 1996 by the Firearms Amendment Act 2018 to empower Victoria Police to proactively and quickly disrupt serious criminal activity associated with the illicit use of firearms. Is the firearm prohibition order scheme civil or criminal in nature? It is civil in nature, just to put that on the table. When can it be made? This speaks to an important safeguard that is inherent in the making of a firearm prohibition order. Section 112E of the Firearms Act 1996 provides that:

The Chief Commissioner may make a firearm prohibition order only if the Chief Commissioner is satisfied that it is in the public interest to do so –

- (a) because of the criminal history of the individual; or
- (b) because of the behaviour of the individual; or
- (c) because of the people with whom the individual associates; or
- (d) because, on the basis of information known to the Chief Commissioner about the individual, the individual may pose a threat or risk to public safety.

The reason I am labouring those key elements is obviously this bill is strengthening powers with regard to Victoria Police, but it has a very good underlying rationale.

When does this firearm prohibition order apply? It applies to an individual immediately after the chief commissioner makes the order under section 112D of the Firearms Act, but – and this is the critical element, I should say, in terms of the turning point with this bill – an FPO does not come into force until it is served on the individual to whom it applies. Herein lies one of the key challenges, because on the one hand we have legislated to ensure that police have the powers to be able to disrupt serious criminal activity but on the other hand there are these noted and significant barriers that can impede them being able to fulfil those elements.

I want to also pose as a devil's advocate. What are the operational impacts of requiring a firearm prohibition order to be served on a person by a police officer? Victoria Police advises – Victoria Police advises; I just note that – serving an FPO requires substantial planning and resource commitment, such as the use of surveillance, the critical incident response team or the special operations group to pinpoint the whereabouts of the subject and attempt to serve them. Further, Victoria Police advises that there is a significant time impost for police to wait for a tactically safe option to serve the order. In some cases several days are spent by detectives in the field trying to locate the individual to whom the FPO applies so that the individual can be served at a time that any firearms in the individual's

possession can be surrendered. So you can see already where the impetus is and the driver is for the significant changes in this bill.

Why should a firearm prohibition order be served in person? Well, this is really, really important. There are two reasons that service should be in person. The first is so that the individual has actual knowledge that the FPO applies to them; this is important given the serious consequences attached to the FPO. The second reason is so that the individual can comply with the duty to surrender any firearm or firearm-related item in their possession. Of course on the one hand we have the police seeking here to fulfil an exercise that will actually enhance community safety, and yet again they are being time and time delayed. What we are seeking to do here is to in effect empower police so that they can not only expediently serve the order but be able to give effect to the order as well.

What are the tactics used to avoid service of a firearm prohibition order? Victoria Police – you can see they were consulted on this bill – report the following service avoidance tactics employed by individuals to whom an unserved FPO applies: regularly relocating residence to frustrate police attendance and refusing to answer the door to a premises when police arrive. You can see that there are a number of significant barriers that can stand in the way of police being able to fulfil their role, and that is to protect us, to keep us safe, hence the imperative for the significant changes in this bill. Really, the amendments in this bill are designed to put Victoria Police in the best possible position to serve an FPO on an individual as soon as possible after it is made so that any risk to community safety can be actively managed through the FPO scheme under the Firearms Act 1996. There are many critical elements to this bill, and I did seek to speak to most of them.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (12:23): I rise today to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. The purposes of this bill are:

- (a) to amend the **Firearms Act 1996** to further provide for –
 - (i) the service of firearm prohibition orders; and
 - (ii) any related and minor matters; and
- (b) to amend the **Control of Weapons Act 1990** to clarify that a machete is a type of knife.

The proposed bill aims to enhance police powers regarding the service of FPOs. Currently FPOs – that is, firearm prohibition orders – must be personally served by a police officer, leading to delays and potential safety risks. Victoria Police identified challenges in serving FPOs to individuals who actively avoid it, are untraceable or are detained. The bill suggests several measures to address these challenges, including allowing the Chief Commissioner of Police to authorise further police powers to deliver FPOs, apply for search warrants to serve FPOs, serve FPOs via registered post and use alternative measures to serve FPOs to uncooperative individuals. Safeguards are incorporated to ensure these powers are used judiciously, such as having specific criteria, procedural protections and oversight mechanisms. Additionally, the bill proposes amending the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to include machetes under controlled weapons.

I want to say something very particular about the Control of Weapons Act. The amendments put forward through this bill on the surface are very straightforward. Unfortunately, however, the amendment will have no impact on decreasing the prevalence of illicit machete possession and crime. It will have zero impact on the sale of machetes. It will have zero impact on the use of machetes in violent crimes. It is a bill utilised for political purposes to make the government look like they are doing something. Section 3 of the Control of Weapons Act defines a controlled weapon as:

- a knife, other than a knife that is a prohibited weapon; or
- an article that is prescribed by the regulations to be a controlled weapon.

Machetes as defined by the *Macquarie Dictionary* and confirmed by the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel are knives and therefore are controlled weapons. The minister confirms that machetes are knives and therefore are already defined as a controlled weapon under the act. The government goes on to claim machetes should continue to be classified as controlled weapons because

they are still used for legitimate purposes, largely in agricultural and horticultural pursuits. So ultimately we have a bill that has clarified a definitional ambiguity, with nothing actually being done to resolve the issue. Simply put, it is too little, too late.

In November 2023 the Liberals and Nationals introduced legislation into the Parliament to amend the Control of Weapons Act to ensure machete possession would be banned by making it a prohibited weapon, a move that was rejected by the state Labor government. In the meantime, machetes continued to be sold to youths and used in violent crimes, with the police lacking the power to proactively remove the weapons from the street. So what we have today is a particularly brazen example of the Labor government again playing politics and playing with the safety of Victorians. I cannot help but be reminded of the Paul Denyer legislation brought forward by the Liberals and Nationals in the form of a private members bill last year, which would have seen at the time Paul Denyer behind bars for life. Again at the time, the then Andrews Labor government rejected this move, completely backtracking and then introducing their own legislation, which effectively did the same thing. The hubris of this Labor government and their routinely demonstrated unwillingness to work with the opposition on matters concerning the lives of Victorians is profoundly alarming and disappointing.

I want to go on the record as saying as well that machetes are genuinely terrifying weapons, as I am sure we can all agree. Indeed they are terrifying partially due to their inefficiency as a weapon. They are designed more for chopping than cutting or thrusting, much like an axe, but unlike an axe the weapon is weighted towards the far end rather than being relatively balanced like a long sword or weighted towards the hilt like other weapons. All of this combines to create a terrifying weapon of raw power that does not kill or injure as cleanly as a sword or a bayonet. This is why many victims of machete attacks will have multiple large yet shallow cuts with a lot of blood. Some are even missing large chunks of flesh.

There is mounting evidence that the possession of serious weapons like machetes is contributing to violent assaults and home invasions in Victoria. Just several days ago, a young man was ambushed outside a busy shopping centre in Weir Views, when a group of masked –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Order! There is too much audible noise again. I will ask everyone just to speak quietly or take it outside. Thank you.

Chris CREWETHER: Noting what you have said, Acting Speaker, I hope that the government members here today will actually listen to the important points raised with respect to this bill. We note that a number of days ago in Weir Views a group of masked, machete-wielding youths exited a vehicle and began chasing him, ultimately leaving the young man bruised and bloodied in the bushes outside the shopping centre. In November last year a man during a bout of road rage slashed another in the head with a machete. May 2023 saw a fatal stabbing of a 16-year-old schoolboy by machete-wielding teens caught on CCTV at the Sunshine train station. June 2022 saw a 23-year-old stabbed repeatedly in Springvale in a savage machete attack. And what about the woman who attacked a girl at random with a metre-long machete at the playground in January 2022? This violence is of a terrible nature, and it is absolutely terrifying, yet the Labor government introduces a bill that really does nothing but feign affirmative action. Sadly, it is increasingly evident that Victoria is suffering from an acute violent crime problem.

Data from the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency released mid last year reported the following statistics. There have been over 19,000 alleged offender incidents involving 10-to-17-year-olds, the highest in a decade. There have been 5098 residential aggravated burglaries, the highest level in 10 years and a 30 per cent increase on the preceding period. Theft from retail stores has risen by 19.4 per cent, and motor vehicle theft is up 17.9 per cent year on year. Furthermore, the latest data shows that in the 2021–22 financial year 820 people went to emergency for a stab wound, a nearly

50 per cent increase from the year before. This is also a jump of 140 per cent since 2012. These statistics, which are alarming, come as Victoria Police members are under-resourced and ill-equipped to combat the rising crime wave and follow significant funding cuts by the Andrews Labor government in early intervention and rehabilitation services, namely the \$4.3 million cut to community crime prevention, the \$6 million cut to youth justice community-based services and more.

Alarming the Mornington Peninsula is also one of the state's top five youth crime hotspots. Figures from the Crime Statistics Agency published by the *Herald Sun* reveal a growing number of children, some as young as 10, are stealing cars, breaking into houses while residents are present and being busted with weapons. Our region, which has a population of over 170,000, as the member for Nepean here can attest to as well, recorded 598 incidents involving juveniles in 2023. There were 75 cars stolen, 45 aggravated burglaries, 26 serious assaults and 10 incidents involving weapons or explosives. Just north, in Kingston, teens armed with machetes have been terrorising school students, prompting youth worker Les Twentyman to call for a ban on their sale in Victoria. The *Mornington Peninsula News* just this last week reported that Mount Martha has become a hotspot for break-ins. Police are doing all they can, and I acknowledge the hard work of Mornington police and others on the peninsula, but resources are stretched. By way of illustration, Mornington police station has had its reception hours reduced from 24 hours to 16 hours from Sunday to Wednesday.

These are real, tangible problems that are beleaguering our state. Yet again, though, we have another bill that fails to make any strides of significance in terms of getting machetes off our streets and out of the hands of violent criminals. Sure, the Allan Labor government is banning the sale of machetes to people under 18, but why not extend this to the adult criminal cohort? There is simply no reason why somebody should be walking around with a machete in an urban area.

I do want to address some of the comments made by the Minister for Police as well. He claims that machetes should continue to be classified as controlled weapons because machetes are used as tools for various legitimate purposes, including horticultural, agricultural and general-purpose activities such as clearing brush and cutting and maintaining trails, yet advice received by the Shadow Minister for Police and others is that machetes are no longer used in many of these settings and should be banned completely.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Before the member for Mordialloc starts, I remind everyone in the chamber to have a bit of respect for the people who are speaking. I am finding it very hard to hear. I would like to hear the member for Mordialloc's contribution because he had a bit to say earlier, so if you could please keep the audible noise down I would appreciate it.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:33): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024 and follow the contribution of the parliamentary secretary for justice, who I think gave an important account of the work that has been done by the department in consultation with Victoria Police and a range of organisations that have been part of this consultative piece. This reasoned amendment – well, I do not know if you could call it reasoned. I do not know how it could be reasoned other than 'We just push it off', even though things have been consulted and Victoria Police have been engaged. I will get to that soon and to some of the challenges in walking from operational into political contexts and the dangers that has for the people that serve and support our local community.

But firstly I want to place on record the challenges that families and communities face when confronted as victims of crime. For anyone who has experienced that, it is a trauma. It sometimes has life-altering impacts. It can affect mental health and wellbeing. It is an individual journey for people then to go on, and for those that are impacted by violent crime or the indictable offences that we are talking about here, sometimes that is a mark on them for life and that impact lives with them. So we place on record that for those that have been victims of crime and sadly had loved ones pass away with some of the youth justice interactions and gang youth crime that we have seen in recent times it has been devastating.

For people that have experienced home invasions we had a community safety forum only a little while ago with our residents in the Mordialloc electorate, and it was a really important opportunity to have our serving Victoria Police members attend, some who are part of Operation Trinity and some who supply resources for Operation Alliance and the work that they do, and to hear directly from those that do the work each and every day on behalf of our community. We place on record our appreciation for the work that they do. It is important when they have got the lived experience each and every day that we listen to the law reforms that they ask for and put those forward. If you heard the previous two contributions in isolation, you would think that there has not been anything done in that space, and it is really disingenuous to come into this place and make such a claim – along with the fact that there has been the most substantive uplift in resources for over a decade for Victoria Police.

I did find it peculiar that the member for Berwick suggested that it was a time for bipartisanship or multipartisanship. I mean, this is the member who against all recommendations from Victoria Police went and created an origami set and did a doorstep for one of the most bizarre things – when the Leader of the Opposition was having his moment in the sun during a press conference and took all the attention away from him – undermined the police investigation and made it all about him. Then he comes in here and says, ‘Oh, can we be bipartisan?’ It is extraordinary. The former member for Warrandyte used to take the cake for being the most divisive on politics, but the member for Berwick has taken the gold medal in that space.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask you to bring the member back to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The member has strayed.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, there is no point of order. The member is being entirely relevant to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I think the member has strayed a little bit wide. I would ask you to come back to the bill at hand.

Tim RICHARDSON: Can I seek clarification, just quickly, Acting Speaker? When points of debate are raised and they are said to be bipartisan, is there an ability to say why the point could not be bipartisan and why the approach of the member’s speech, the contribution made and the reasoned amendment are not bipartisan at all in their approach and to challenge that in debate? Where would be the line in that space in your ruling?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I have already made the ruling on the point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: Going back to the point around bipartisanship on police matters, this is a really important point, because when you say that you respect the operational integrity of Victoria Police and then you have political figures who say it is literally not safe to go out in Melbourne anymore, it is literally not safe to take your family into the streets of Melbourne, that is the kind of narrative and that is the kind of rhetoric that takes us down a low road. I have had the opportunity to serve my community now into a third term, and I remember the debates in 2018 from those out in the south-east – the member for Berwick and the member for La Trobe at that time, who continues to serve – and the narrative around the particular figures for those that were committing youth crime. When our Chief Commissioner of Police, our serving Victoria Police commissioner, comes out and says there is about a 220-member cohort that we are dealing with and that we are managing, that is the lived experience. When I take the Minister for Police to Springvale police station and we go and see the legends at Chelsea police station, Mordialloc and Cheltenham and those that serve SD2 and SD3, we hear directly from Victoria Police on the work that they are doing and the interventions they are making. It was completely wrong and disingenuous for the member for Mornington to say that we are not investing in crime prevention.

The budget alone put \$54 million into supporting young people in the community and in custody to help improve life outcomes. As a former Parliamentary Secretary for Schools, one of the biggest elements of youth justice interaction is in the schools and the education that happen in our youth justice facilities, including at Parkville and the work that is done there. To try to say that you are looking for a bipartisan position but then to creep into operational matters and tarnish the work that is being done by Victoria Police by undermining the consultative work that they have done and their engagement, is just absolutely unfathomable. I just do not understand a shadow minister coming in and saying 'Oh, we support the operational integrity of Victoria Police' and then undermining them with this reasoned amendment and attacking them directly for the powers that they have asked for directly. It is absolutely atrocious. I do not know if there is an opportunity for other speakers to elaborate on their reflections on Victoria Police and their service, but the bill is well defined with what has been asked for, and we have done that each and every time.

When Victoria Police needed more resources, there were 3600 extra police officers, sworn officers, delivered. The academy is full at the moment. We have an issue with shortages and attrition, but that is being experienced across all states and territories at the moment. That is not a unique situation to Victoria. But it is not just about saying it and it is not just about trying to get political hits, it is about looking at the funded record, budget after budget. When you see Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing after Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing, we are supporting the work of Victoria Police – supporting and funding that outcome. We did not cut budgets to Victoria Police or emergency services, we have increased that funding and support into the future. That is the lived experience of Victorians.

Yes, there are challenges, but as the Chief Commissioner of Police has said, there is a cohort of about 220 Victorians that we are dealing with at the moment. They are some of the lowest rates that we see in the nation. Yes, it is a challenge when we see other states and territories and jurisdictions, but if we are evidence-based in our approach to crime prevention and intervention, the numbers are important. And the inverse of that is the amount of youth offenders who are in youth justice at the moment. We have seen substantially the challenges that are faced in recidivism rates that have not moved, that have stubbornly been the same. We need to do more to change the trajectory of youth offenders and offenders more broadly. It sits around the low 40 per cent mark in our system. So we need to do all we can, and that is why we are funding those reform projects. That is why we have transformational work in early intervention and why Victoria Police and a range of education providers create those community connections and links and support. That is how you do it. You do it through the hard work, not by trying to get a grab and a one-day sugar hit on a media attempt. It is about doing the hard policy work year in, year out – funding it, consulting on it and working through that. That is the approach that has been taken by the Allan Labor government in this space.

This bill is important for a range of reasons and is a segment in a range of works that we have done in law reform to make sure that we absolutely clarify the unlawfulness of having machete weapons and the impact that has. That sends a signal to community as well, and it goes with a wide range of law reforms. People quickly forget the law reforms that we did around home invasions. The member for Mornington is literally saying that nothing has been done. I know that he used to dominate in the federal space, but there was a huge amount done. The home invasion reforms which were talked about locally by our serving members of Victoria Police were a direct result of consultation that was commented on by the opposition at the time in various forms and put forward respecting the operational integrity and respecting the powers that had been asked for and then the offences that have been put in place. And that offending has changed over time. Do not take my word for it – there were literally members of SD2, southern district 2, out in my area, representing my community, who said the offence type has changed as a result of those reforms coming in on home invasions.

If you are going to be serious and front up with a decent multipartisan approach to law reform that respects families that have been impacted and talks about some of the myriad of crime challenges that we have, from neurological challenges that kids have, to trauma and abuse – if you want to have a

decent conversation and an electoral conversation, not some half-baked reasoned amendment here that does not stack up at all – then let us get serious about law reform and support Victorians and Victoria Police.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:43): I rise to make a contribution on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. Before going to the actual bill and the reasoned amendment I might remind the member for Mordialloc, who thinks he has dominated this chamber in his time in here, that if my memory serves me correctly, I think there have been 38 ministerial changes since the member for Mordialloc arrived here. So if he is such a talent, if he is so well spoken, why wasn't he actually –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on his feet knows that this is not a time to cast reflections on members of this place. I ask that you draw the Leader of the Nationals back to the bill. He has certainly been in this place long enough to know the forms and the rules of this house, and I ask you to bring him back to debating the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I would ask the member to actually start debating the bill. But I will remind people that points of order are to be succinct.

Peter WALSH: I was trying to reflect positively on the member for Mordialloc; I do not know why the Leader of the House took exception to it. But I go back to the bill and the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Berwick:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted following stakeholder consultation on what effect classifying a machete as a prohibited weapon would have on protecting the public against the use of machetes, while ensuring the bill retains the important changes to the service of firearm prohibition orders.'

The member for Berwick has got it in one with that reasoned amendment. It is a very good reasoned amendment. It goes to protecting the good part of the bill, which concerns the serving of firearm prohibition orders. On this side the chamber we are absolutely in favour of that part of the bill. I think the government is doing things with that particular part of the bill to protect Victorians. Where the failure is is around the classification of machetes, as the member for Berwick talked about in his contribution to this bill.

I have been involved in agriculture my whole life. I was born and raised on a farm. I was involved in agriculture before I came into this place. I cannot ever remember anyone using a machete as an agricultural tool, so to have it classified that people need a machete somehow on their farms to do stuff I find rather interesting. You can go to Bunnings, you can go to the Stihl shop – you can go to a lot of places – to buy things that will do this work a lot easier than a machete ever would. I cannot see people using machetes in the future for these sorts of purposes. To have that as a reason that a machete should not be made a prohibited weapon I find rather interesting, so I support the member for Berwick in saying that there should be more rules around machetes.

I had the opportunity last year, as you are going to this year, I think, Acting Speaker Farnham, to go and walk the Kokoda Trail. When you see the machetes that the porters carry for good reason – if they want to cut down a small tree or whatever – they are lethal weapons. I would absolutely hate and be petrified to be involved in a home invasion where someone invaded the house I was in with a machete or to be attacked in the street by someone with a machete. They are lethal weapons. They just look dangerous. They look like they would do a lot of damage if you were attacked with them. That is the point the member for Berwick has been making, but he has not been making it in his own right; he has been making it based on the feedback he is getting from the community.

One of the core responsibilities of the government of the day is to keep people safe, to keep Victorians safe. This is a debate that has happened here over time with some of the various legislative changes that have happened around community safety. I think this is one that should be had again, which is why I support the member for Berwick's reasoned amendment that this bill be withdrawn until that

consultation takes place and there is a better definition put around the sale and ownership of machetes and how people, if they do have machetes under an exemption, can make sure they are kept safe.

If you have a firearm, you have to have a gun safe. If you carry a gun, there are rules around how you carry that gun in your motor vehicle. If someone does have a machete, they should have the same rules there. To have one lying around the garden shed or to have one lying around the farm shed that can be stolen I think is something that needs to be addressed. Quite rightly, post Port Arthur there were increased rules brought in around gun ownership and the type of guns that people could own, and there were very strict rules brought in around gun safes and the fact that if you do have a firearm, you have to have a gun safe, and you have to have a different safe for your ammunition. They are stored under two different keys so if someone does somehow get your gun, they cannot get the ammunition and vice versa. They were good changes at that time. I would suggest to the government that how we are to deal with machetes in society in the future would be a good change to make as well, so I support that reasoned amendment from the member for Berwick.

On the wider issue of community safety, I think we are coming to a situation in Victoria, and there are other people with pieces of legislation around at the moment, particularly the bill from the member for Malvern – his bill in the other house – around the government's proposal to change the bail laws. If you are talking about community safety, I would like to see the government act on that issue as well. Bail is not an entitlement. My observation would be that too many people that commit an offence think that they are just entitled to have a revolving door and get bail.

Bail is actually a privilege that people should respect. If they get bail, that is a privilege they have got to not be in the remand centre, a privilege they have got to be back in society living their life rather than being in the remand centre. Why would you have the fact that if someone is on bail and they commit an indictable offence, they are able to just apply for bail again, as anyone else would? That takes away the fact that it is a privilege. That means it just becomes a revolving door for people who are back in society, back in the environment they have been living in in the past, and if they are involved in circumstances where they may be under bad influences, the ability to commit an offence and then just get out on bail again is there, and they will not take it seriously. If bail is a privilege, as I have said, people will take it more seriously. If you commit an offence – you have not been found guilty but you have committed an offence – and you are out on bail, you know at some stage in the future there will be a court hearing, and you will know that if you commit another offence it is going to be a lot harder to get out on bail again under the amendments proposed by the member for Malvern. So I would urge the government to seriously look at that bill that has been brought into the upper house. Actually do not enact the legislation that is going to change those bail laws later in March. I believe that if the Labor members of this place actually went out into their constituencies constituents and had a conversation with the community about the pros and cons of both, I think they would find that they would get feedback that says, 'You're heading down the wrong path on this particular issue.'

On the two things that I have talked about, I urge the government to support the member for Berwick on his reasoned amendment. Let us go back to the drawing board. Let us have a look at the definition of 'machete' and who can and cannot own a machete, and as I talked about with gun safes, if someone does have a machete, let us look at how it is actually stored so it cannot be stolen and used with ill intent. And the other one, to finish off, would be just to urge the government to support the member for Malvern in making sure those changes to the bail law are enacted and we keep the community a lot safer.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:52): I too rise to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. I have to say that usually I stand here and I say it is with a great deal of pleasure I rise to speak on bills before this house, but it does fill me with a great deal of sadness to have to rise to speak on machetes and knives. I am going to in my contribution talk about some of the community safety issues my community, particularly in Brimbank and Wyndham, are facing right now in relation to machetes and knives as part of this bill and why this bill is so important

to come before this house. I would urge the opposition to go ahead and support the bill. This is really important, the impact that it will have on my local community.

The purpose of the bill is to provide police with greater powers to tackle the prevalence of machetes in our community. I think that is something that the people in my local community will be very, very happy to hear. I want to start my contribution by acknowledging the incredible work of Victoria Police in keeping our community safe. Each and every police officer and PSO that is on the beat every single day at all hours of the day in all weather conditions is doing their best to stop crimes and protect and serve Victorians, particularly in my local community, in my electorate of Laverton. Over the past two years we have had 500 new police officers and 50 PSOs be trained and funded on top of the 3100 additional police that our government has already put on our streets since being elected to government in 2014.

Last year I had a really great opportunity to go ahead and meet many local police that serve my community in Melbourne's west. The Minister for Police and I visited not one police station but three – the three biggies in the west, I say: Sunshine police station, Wyndham North police station and the absolutely huge upgraded rebuild of Werribee station. It was really great to sit down and hear directly, alongside the Minister for Police, from local police, who were told to speak frankly and robustly about issues within our local community in relation to community safety and most importantly the support they needed from us to go ahead and do their jobs. I am not going to use up my time today to reiterate what was said at those meetings, but I do have to say that I found them quite insightful.

This bill before us today will play a really important role in doing exactly that: helping police stop the use and distribution of dangerous weapons in this state and in my local community. I will say that this bill is particularly important for folks in the west because, sadly, we have experienced these kinds of crimes involving machetes and knives too many times. It is never pleasant to have to stand here and speak about these kinds of things happening in my local community. Sometimes I tend to not speak about them, but I feel strongly about this one, because this bill is introducing a change that is going to be really important to help protect them. But I also want to acknowledge that these instances and incidents – tragic ones, sometimes leading to the deaths of very young people – do happen, and they do happen in my electorate of Laverton.

My office and I have had so many conversations with residents right across my electorate who have told us of all these types of crimes, like residents living near Sunshine station who have had boys knocking on their doors trying to hide from other young boys carrying machetes or where school students have been stabbed and tragically killed just trying to catch the train and go home. I have had parents out in Wyndham call my office and describe the worst kinds of home invasions where these weapons have been used. They have truly been terrified – their lives changed forever. I say this before the house because I want to acknowledge their pain and the experience that they suffered, and I do want to say to them: we hear you and we are doing something about it. That is exactly why we have introduced this bill and why we are debating it today.

Those on the other side might like to play politics with these sorts of tragedies and incidents that happen in communities like mine. I note the member for Berwick referred to me earlier today – sadly, I was not in the chamber. I do not believe we should be playing politics with these kinds of issues. They are serious, they are extremely complicated and they require serious people to address them. But all of us are grateful for the work done by our local police in Sunshine, Tarneit and Werribee, responding to crimes when they happen and then offering the support that they do indeed give to victims and families. But I also want to be very clear, and I want my community and people in this chamber to hear this: these extreme incidents and tragedies do not define our community in Melbourne's west. The people who commit these acts and use these kinds of weapons do not represent Melbourne's west. They do not represent Victoria or indeed the vast majority of Victorians. I mention this to highlight just how important a bill like this is for communities like mine in the west, and I know it will be the same for many members in this place and their electorates and their communities.

The bill makes a really important amendment to the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to provide absolute clarity that a machete is considered a knife and therefore is considered a controlled weapon. Under the current legislation a controlled weapon is defined as a knife other than a knife that is a prohibited weapon or another article that is prescribed as such under the regulations. As it currently stands, there are only four scheduled articles, those being spears, guns, batons, cudgels – I can only imagine what they look like – bayonets and cattle prods. What these provisions and regulations will mean for machetes is that it will be unlawful to possess, carry or use them without lawful excuse and they cannot be sold to or purchased by persons under 18. That is a very clear message to people in my community.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Order! It is now time to break for lunch, because I do not get a figure like this by skipping meals. The member may resume when the debate resumes.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Government Services

Minister for Prevention of Family Violence

Minister for Agriculture

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I rise to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today the Assistant Treasurer will answer questions for the portfolios of government services, consumer affairs and public transport; the Minister for Jobs and Industry will answer questions for the portfolios of employment and prevention of family violence; the Minister for Veterans will answer questions for the portfolio of carers and volunteers; and the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events will answer questions for the portfolios of community sport and agriculture.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Payroll tax

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. During a cost-of-living crisis the health tax will increase the cost of seeing a GP by nearly 30 per cent. This will bring the cost of seeing a doctor to about \$100 per visit. Why is the government refusing to give Victorians cost-of-living relief by scrapping the health tax like their Labor colleagues in Queensland?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and at the outset can I correct his characterisation of the arrangements we have in place here in Victoria. Indeed I think between me, the Minister for Health and the Treasurer we have been clarifying this for some time now, as the Leader of the Opposition continues to deliberately misrepresent the arrangements that are in place here in Victoria. Indeed with payroll arrangements there has been no change to the law or the application of the payroll arrangements in relation to GPs or medical centres. So in terms of the beginning of the Leader of the Opposition's question I want to make it absolutely clear that there has been no change to the law or the application, despite the ongoing misrepresentation of the issue by the Leader of the Opposition.

Also the Leader of the Opposition asked about what we were doing to provide cost-of-living support to households in Victoria, and in the health area alone, following a decade of mismanagement and neglect by the former federal Liberal–National government that has resulted in the primary care system being on its knees –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I ask you to draw the Premier back to the question, which is about scrapping the health tax.

Jacinta ALLAN: On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's question, at the end of his question, included a request for me to provide advice to the house on what support we were providing on cost-of-living measures, and that is exactly what I was doing.

James Newbury: Further on the point of order, Speaker, multiple rulings from the Speaker make it clear that it is important for an answer to be not general but specific to the question. I put it to you that the answer being provided is not directly linked to the question.

The SPEAKER: The question referred to the cost-of-living crisis, to the cost of seeing a doctor. I think the Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Indeed I was, Speaker, thank you. I was saying that, following what we saw was primary care being the primary responsibility of the Commonwealth government and how the system has been broken as a result of a decade of mismanagement and failure by the Liberal–National government, we have stepped in in unprecedented ways, whether it is with the 29 primary care centres –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: There is one that is open right now in my community in Bendigo. There are a number in a range of locations around the state. There is of course the community pharmacy pilot. The minister and I were very pleased to be at Nam Tran's pharmacy on Bourke Street, the Priceline pharmacy on Bourke Street, on Tuesday where not only can you, particularly for women, go and get your pill script refilled, get treated for urinary tract infections or get your travel vaccines but we are now expanding that to mild skin conditions – psoriasis, shingles – but not thin skins, as the Minister for Health pointed out earlier in the week. I will credit the Minister for Health with that reference.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to bring the Premier back to the question and ask her to stop debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Indeed, for those of us who need access to this sort of care in regional Victoria, 27 per cent of the community pharmacies that are participating in the pilot are located in regional Victoria, as well as a number of locations across metropolitan Melbourne. That is the work we will continue to do to support families, whether it is with cost-of-living measures in health or a range of different areas. That is what we are focused on.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): With GP clinics set to challenge the validity of the health tax, will the Labor government admit it has got it wrong and scrap this tax?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): Again the Leader of the Opposition's question is not an accurate reflection of the arrangements that have not changed here in Victoria in regard to general practitioners. I note for the record – and this is some advice I received from the Treasurer – that 80 per cent of GPs across the state are not subject to these payroll tax arrangements. We will continue to provide support to our hardworking general practitioners. We have stepped in in an area that has historically not been the responsibility of the state government, but we had to do it because the National–Liberal government in Canberra for 10 years failed.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: You were up there. You were part of that show.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, a number of Speakers have ruled that a response must address the question. I put it to you that this response does not address the question.

The SPEAKER: I believe the Premier was addressing the question that was asked. I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: fire and storm events

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): I rise to update the house on the extreme weather events that are being experienced across the state. As I speak, we have emergency services personnel responding to a number of fires, particularly in the west of the state. I have just before question time today received advice from the emergency management commissioner Rick Nugent that there is a significant fire moving very quickly in the proximity of Warrak near Buangor. Commissioner Nugent has advised me that the fire has moved through a forested area, burning at least 1000 hectares, and is spotting more than 600 metres ahead of the fire front.

In addition to the work of crews on the ground, aerial assets have been deployed in the air as the focus moves to asset protection in the local area. At 12:58 today an ‘Emergency warning – fire – leave immediately’ alert was issued for the area, and just before question time at 1:11 a ‘Watch and act – prepare to evacuate’ went to areas further ahead of the fire. Plus we know that there is a wind change coming through the area later today and into the evening, which will add to the challenges being experienced by crews on the ground and in the air. I also advise that a relief centre has been established in the area of Beaufort, and I acknowledge the member for Ripon for already reaching out and making contact with the local government to provide them with support.

Today was predicted to be another very difficult day of extreme fire risk and wind associated with that. The State Control Centre team have been activated to tier 3 and are deploying assets, as we have seen already, across the state. There is a role for all of us too to make sure we have got the VicEmergency app, to make sure we are aware of our surroundings and to follow the advice of the warnings. Also, please do check on any family, friends or neighbours who you think may be vulnerable to either the fire front that is moving or the extreme heat.

Bail laws

Michael O’BRIEN (Malvern) (14:12): My question is to the Premier. The Attorney-General in the other place boldly yet incorrectly declared, ‘We are not weakening bail laws’. Yet in 32 days time Labor is abolishing section 30B of the Bail Act. This section makes it a crime to commit an indictable offence whilst on bail. Abolishing this offence will make it easier for repeat serious offenders to keep getting bail. Why is the Premier putting Victorians at risk from repeat serious offenders by weakening Victoria’s bail laws?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): I thank the member for Malvern for his question. At the outset, the member for Malvern is referring to legislation that passed through the Parliament last year, legislation that, as he identifies, comes into effect in the near future and was supported by the Liberal Party in the other place. It was supported. Ultimately, the final bill was supported by the Liberal opposition in –

Michael O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, standing orders provide that answers must be factual. The fact is that the opposition opposed that measure, and that is on the record.

The SPEAKER: I do not know whether that is factual or not – I am not privy to that – but the Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Indeed I will repeat for the record: the final bill passed the Legislative Council and therefore the Parliament with the support of the Liberal opposition. The member for Malvern also knows that changes have not been made to the tests for serious offences. We have seen, since the passage of the bill last year, the member for Malvern and some of his colleagues take opportunistic opportunities to misrepresent both their position on this legislation and what was contained in the legislation. As I said, changes have not been made to the tests for serious offences, and I would hope that the member for Malvern would learn the lessons of the past and understand that misrepresenting what goes on in this place or misrepresenting what is happening in our community does nothing to support community safety and does nothing to support community cohesion.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:15): Abolishing section 30B will make it easier for repeat serious offenders to keep getting bail. Will the Premier take responsibility for the community safety consequences of weakening bail laws on 25 March?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15): Again, there has not been, as I have pointed out to the member for Malvern, in legislation that was passed through the Parliament – legislation that those opposite supported – any changes to the tests for serious offences, so his reference to a weakening is a misrepresentation of the legislation that was passed through the Parliament and a misrepresentation in terms of the law that is coming into place in coming days.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: police resources

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:16): I rise to update the house on the work the Allan Labor government is doing to ensure Victoria Police have the tools and resources they need to keep Victorians safe. Frontline police and protective services officers will be equipped with new conducted energy devices, better known as tasers, giving them more nonlethal options to safely respond to violent offenders. I recently joined the Chief Commissioner of Police at the police academy to announce that the government is investing \$214 million to equip over 10,000 Victorian police and PSOs with tasers.

The rollout will give our frontline officers and PSOs another tactical option in their arsenal to make sure they can respond quickly and safely to active incidents, better protecting both officers and the community at large. Victoria Police will be equipped with the new generation 7 tasers, a model that offers improved technology, accuracy and speed. Those tasers will also activate body-worn cameras, ensuring that there are independent records of incidents. The rollout also includes specialist training for all frontline officers.

Our police are often called on to make split-second decisions in dynamic situations. They are highly trained, and we want them to make the hard calls. Victoria Police look to the blue uniform for leadership and safety. We will back our police when they follow their training and make the tough calls to keep Victorians safe.

This significant investment in technology is part of our government's \$4.5 billion investment in Victoria Police. It is funding that has delivered 3600 additional funded police officers and upgraded police stations across the state. We have the largest police service in the country. Our offence rate remains below 2019 prepandemic levels. I look forward to joining the member for Yan Yean at Mernda station tomorrow. We will get out to the Wodonga station as well and on Saturday to the single-officer station at Dederang, because wherever our police serve, in the largest cities and towns or our smallest communities, they continue to keep Victorians safe, and they will have the support to have every resource they need from the Allan Labor government to keep Victorians safe.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am very disappointed at the interjections while the minister was on his feet. Members will be removed without warning.

Energy security

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:18): My question is to the Premier. The Labor government supported the 2022 electricity distribution network resilience review recommendation that real changes needed to be made so that there would be more investment in the resilience of the energy network grid. Why hasn't the Labor government actioned this recommendation?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:19): I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question. I reckon he made a strategic choice to ask me the question and not the minister for energy. I think that was a strategic decision on the Leader of the Nationals Party's behalf, quite strategic. It shows that there are some tactics that go on in their tactics meetings on the other side of the chamber. There are some tactics that go on over there.

I will take some further advice from the energy minister. However, I note that you can only have a review of that type if the government initiates it, and following the storm events of 2021 and moving into 2022 we initiated the review, and indeed the recommendations have been accepted from that review and we are working on implementing them. I can give you a good example – two good examples. There is the legislation that passed through the Parliament last year that gave the state minister the opportunity and the powers to intervene with the privatised power companies, and we all know why she needed to have that legislation passed through the Parliament, don't we. The privatised power stations, the privatised transmission lines, the privatised distribution networks – we needed to have additional support for the minister for energy to do her work in dealing with those privatised entities that are managed by the national regulator.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Frankston, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has had plenty of time to give background to the question, and I would ask you to bring her back to answering the question as to why the government has not actioned the recommendations out of that review.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Nationals has re-asked the question. I remind members that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: The other example is of course a recommendation that was around providing for greater localised resilience for communities that were particularly at risk and vulnerable to high weather events like that which we saw come through our state last week and also which we saw in a number of locations in both June and October 2021. The example I give is the investment that was made in putting solar panels on community buildings and making sure they were connected up to localised batteries so that you could provide some additional resilience into local communities when you have a weather event like that which we saw last week that went through our state, which was of a massive size and scale in terms of the destruction that occurred. We will continue to do everything we can in a privatised network. A former Liberal–National government privatised the power stations, privatised the transmission lines, privatised the distribution businesses –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: The minister for energy is working incredibly hard, both implementing recommendations out of the review –

John Pesutto interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: You can talk to AusNet about how much intervention the minister for energy has had with that organisation in the last week. That is exactly the work that we will continue to support Victorian communities.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, I am tired of reminding you not to interject across the table. The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:22): Given Labor's failure to act on the 2022 recommendations, how can Victorians have any confidence that Labor's sham inquiry into last week's events will improve the resilience of the energy grid?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): In my ministers statement earlier I outlined to the house how we have emergency services personnel on the ground right now fighting fires and responding to the high wind events that are being experienced across the state, and as a result of that there have been additional power outages. I think it is incumbent upon us to allow those emergency services to do their work. In reference to the inquiry, it is far better in terms of learning the lessons from these sorts of extreme weather events to have this work done by experts and independents, not by politicians who are doing it for a political stunt to correct their own homework.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question. We all understand the risks of today. We all understand what the emergency services are doing, and we will not be verballed –

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals knows that that is not the way to raise a point of order. You have been in this place a very long time. That is not a point of order. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the National Party's presentation of the inquiry speaks to the politics behind the antics of the opposition this week. We will continue to support communities as they work through the emergency being faced right now and look at how we can strengthen our response into the future.

Ministers statements: economy

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:25): I am pleased to update the house on the true state of business creation in the state of Victoria. We all saw earlier this week data that was presented from that pseudo think tank the Institute of Public Affairs with cherrypicked figures that claimed that business growth was down. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact you would have to be a statistically challenged dullard to believe it. The fact is that over the past four years more than 107,000 new businesses have been created in Victoria, more than any other state – in fact more than Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania combined. 165,000 businesses have been created since this government came to office.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eildon can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.

Tim PALLAS: 165,000 is six times more, year on year, every year that we have been in government compared to the number of businesses created when those economic geniuses who cannot even read statistics were last in government.

When you look at the fact that our startup sector has grown from \$5.8 billion in 2016 to \$103 billion today, it stands to reason – with 750,000 new jobs over the past decade – that businesses continue to grow and they continue to employ, and Victorians are benefiting. That is why we have the lowest unemployment level in the nation. How do people get employed? Well, businesses employ them. I think we can safely assume that the lion's share of employment is being done by businesses that are growing at record levels, six times faster than those opposite.

Middle East conflict

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:27): My question is to the Premier. People around the world are watching in horror what is unfolding in Gaza right now, a humanitarian catastrophe that is really on a scale that is just unfathomable. Australia has allowed a very small number of people from Gaza

who are fleeing the war to come to our country for safety. Some of those have made their way here to Victoria, but most have not been granted refugee status, which means they are not eligible for things like housing, material aid or even work rights to support themselves. Most are on restrictive bridging visas, so they are relying on the generosity of their neighbours for even basic things like food to survive. Premier, will the Victorian government step in and provide some urgent and direct funding to asylum seeker organisations so that these Palestinians in Victoria who are fleeing for their lives can access things like food?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:28): I thank the member for Melbourne for both her question and her presentation of the issue in this place. I think it carries the appropriate tone to consider these matters in this place. The member for Melbourne has rightly in her question identified the role of the federal government in terms of the settlement of refugees and the granting of refugee status for people. I think we should be clear that it will not just be people restricted to the geographic area of Gaza that may be seeking assistance from other countries, it will also be the broader region as well given the widespread nature of the conflict that the world is witnessing across that part of the Middle East.

In terms of what support we would provide for people choosing Melbourne and Victoria to settle in in the context of both this conflict and the humanitarian crisis, we will of course support the work of the federal government, as we have done in the past with other communities who have experienced conflict in parts of the world that may be a long way from here. They know that if they come here they will receive support and they will receive care and love as well given the horrific experiences they will be leaving behind.

I will seek some advice from the federal government in terms of what their arrangements may be and how we can provide support to families and individuals who may be coming here under significant distress but also do that in the context of the way we have provided ongoing support to communities that are here. Should there be people choosing to come to Melbourne or Victoria, they will be coming into the arms of people who are also grieving with them, and it is incumbent upon us to ensure, whether it is members of our Jewish community or members of our Islamic community, that we provide them with support.

Indeed I want to acknowledge the work of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the Deputy Premier, who have been working to provide practical additional support since the terrorist invasion on 7 October to those communities. I again urge all of us, but particularly the member for Melbourne and her colleagues, to maintain that frame in contributing to this public conversation. It is incumbent upon all of us to take a leadership position and remember that language and actions are important and that that is the best way that we can show support to communities who are suffering and grieving.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:31): Thank you, Premier. The Premier mentioned that it is the federal government's responsibility primarily, but in 2019 when a group of asylum seekers from offshore detention centres were in Victoria for medical care – they were known as the Medivac refugees – the state government stepped in to provide direct funding for food and housing to asylum seeker organisations to plug a gap where the federal government had failed. Groups are telling us that they are in desperate need of this funding again to support these refugees. Will the Premier meet with the Muslim Women's Council of Victoria to directly hear from them about their funding asks and then provide that funding to those groups?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): I indicated this in my earlier answer, and it has been emphasised by the member for Melbourne, who has given an example of exactly the sort of practical support we can provide. As I said in my earlier answer, I will seek some further advice from Victorian government agencies but also the federal government on what support may be required. If the member could provide information from the organisation she referred to, I anticipate that the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the Deputy Premier may have already had some engagement with that group. Again, I cannot emphasise strongly enough how critically important it is that we

support communities that we all care about, which we all are acutely aware are grieving and are suffering, and make sure that our actions do not add to that distress and concern. It is absolutely in that frame that we will continue to provide support to local communities.

Ministers statements: digital jobs

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:33): I rise to update the house that the Allan Labor government is delivering the workforce that is needed for not only the jobs of today but the jobs of tomorrow. Victoria has around 280,000 tech workers, which accounts for around 31 per cent of Australia's federal workforce. This week I was proud to announce our nation-leading digital jobs program, which has supported over 5000 Victorian workers to complete some specialised training in this field.

This program provides – I have got to say at free cost – digital skills for in-demand jobs in critical sectors like cybersecurity, programming and digital marketing. We are partnering with around 350 businesses to get job placements in place at the end of these courses: companies including Jetstar, carsales.com, NBN Co, Zendesk and Salesforce. We have been able to support workers into job placements and to support companies by providing them in a timely manner with this skilled workforce. Our digital jobs program has a really strong focus on supporting workers that are traditionally under-represented in this sector, with 59 per cent of participants being women and 64 per cent speaking a language other than English. Victorians in the middle of their careers are being given the opportunity and support to transition into the tech workforce.

This is what this government is all about: skilling our workforce, supporting industry to grow and creating high-value jobs. It also complements the investments we are making across the education and training sector, including free TAFE. Unlike those opposite, who slashed funding for skills development and watched local industries disappear, this government will always support Victorian workers and businesses into the future.

Taxation

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:35): My question is to the Treasurer. Last week –

Members interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: This one is a good one too, don't worry. This one is a very good one. Last week I met with Rudi and Letty, the hardworking owners of Philmart Asian Groceries in Roxburgh Park in the Labor-held seat of Greenvale. He has been relegated. He is right around the corner.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sandringham will be heard without assistance. The member for Sandringham to start his question from the beginning.

Brad ROWSWELL: My question is to the Treasurer. Last week I met with Rudi and Letty, the hardworking owners of Philmart Asian Groceries in Roxburgh Park in the Labor-held seat of Greenvale. Rudi and Letty may be forced to close their business because their rent has soared due to Labor's land tax increases. Why is the Labor government slugging Victorian businesses with new taxes?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:37): I thank the member for Sandringham for his question. Can I be very clear that when this government produced its most recent budget we also identified what our COVID debt repayment strategy was. That is what responsible economic managers do: provide our balance sheet as a way of assisting businesses through a very difficult pandemic. \$21 billion worth of assistance went directly to business, but ultimately of course we do need to recognise that as a state we have to ensure that that investment in the growth, the integrity and the stability of business is returned to the state. It has been returned in many ways through business itself.

How has it been returned? Well, we have the strongest business sector in the nation and the strongest jobs growth in the nation, and in effect we have just heard that we have the strongest business startup in the nation. So in practical terms the decision that we have made in terms of putting in a COVID debt repayment levy on land tax is targeted and it is temporary, but it is aimed to ensure that those with the capacity to make a contribution towards the repayment of funds we provided up-front to business throughout the trepidations of the pandemic are adequately responded to.

From our perspective as a government we have also gone to great lengths to make sure that we get the balance of tax and the burden of tax right. For example, we have progressively increased the payroll tax free threshold from \$900,000 to \$1 million. For the businesses in question, those who pay land tax will be the beneficiaries of our commercial and industrial land tax reforms, reforms that the Victorian chamber described in extremely positive terms. This is a government that is about reform, is about fairness and is about making sure that where we have the capacity to grow the state, to put in place appropriate measures to manage the burden of a society that expects and deserves good-quality services from the state government, we do that and that when we can change the tax mix to grow the economy we do so as well. I think the jury is well and truly in if you look at the fact that Victoria, through its taxing regimes, through its effort, is the strongest growing economy and is projected to be the strongest growing economy in the nation for the next five years by Deloitte Access Economics.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for South Barwon, you can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:40): Labor's taxes are driving Victorian businesses away. Will the Treasurer guarantee no new or increased taxes in the upcoming budget?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:41): I will not be drawn on what is in and what is not in the budget. Let me be very clear about that. That is my responsibility to deliver, and I will deliver it on budget day. But not only is the member for Sandringham statistically challenged – after all we have created six times more businesses than they did year on year in government – but he also does not listen to or learn from the efforts that this government has put in place. As you would appreciate, we have gone to great lengths to ensure that businesses are properly dealt with in a dynamic taxing environment, so we are abolishing business insurance duty to help businesses prepare for unforeseen business charges. That is more than \$275 million worth of reduced costs over the next three years.

Ministers statements: regional events

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:42): It is fair to say we are continuing our love story with Victoria's world-class sporting, arts and cultural events in regional communities. Our regional events calendar is a key part of Victoria's \$36.9 billion visitor economy, which continues to grow. In fact since 2019 our tourism economy has grown in every region in this state. We had the recent Ballarat International Foto Biennale, which I know the members for Wendouree, Eureka and Ripon loved. Last month I joined the member for Geelong and the huge crowds at the annual Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race and the Festival of Sails. Late last year I opened the *Emerging from Darkness* exhibition at the Hamilton Gallery in the member for Lowan's electorate, one of the most ambitious exhibitions ever held in regional Australia.

A fundamental part of our regional economies is the delivery of events, because they attract visitors and they support local jobs. Many of these are funded by the Regional Events Fund, which has been telling stories and showcasing our culture on a local, state and international level. This Labour Day weekend Lakes Entrance will show why it is the fishing mecca, with Hooked on Lakes returning for its seventh year running. It is a free event open to the public where families can experience the wonders

of East Gippsland. In the Allan Labor government we are not just hooked on lakes, we are hooked on making Victoria a recreational fisher's wildest dream. We have stocked our waterways, invested in better piers, jetties and ramps and made it cheaper for families to get out on the water by abolishing fees. When you grab your fishing rod, pull out your best bait and cast out a line, know that only the very good salmon will jump on the bait to take the hook.

Constituency questions

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:45): (520) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. When will construction commence on the redevelopment and expansion of the Maroondah Hospital? My constituents deserve the highest quality of health care, with Maroondah Hospital the closest public hospital available. They eagerly await this long-overdue redevelopment and expansion.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:45): (521) My question is for the Minister for Environment. As the minister knows, our government recently introduced the state's first overarching air quality strategy, *Clean Air for All Victorians*. Over the next decade this plan will target pollution and improve air quality as we reach our target of a 45 to 50 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030 and net zero by 2035, targets we are actually legislating this week. It also states our government's goal to advocate for stronger national standards, improved air quality monitoring and providing better access to information for the community. As part of this strategy the air quality improvement precincts grant program, which is run by Sustainability Victoria, recently approved \$516,000 in funding for air quality improvements for businesses in Melbourne's west. Many of these businesses are in my electorate, which contains some of the largest industrial suburbs in Melbourne. My question to the minister is this: what projects have been funded in my electorate of Laverton from the air quality improvement precincts program?

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:46): (522) My question is to the Minister for Health. Mildura Base Public Hospital is \$23 million in the red in the first six months of the financial year – or to the constituents in Mildura, costing more but delivering less despite staff on the wards and in the emergency department working harder than ever before, and we thank them for that. Here are the facts: hospital admissions down 12 per cent; fewer babies born, down 14 per cent; dialysis treatment down 6 per cent; and no increase in ambulance arrivals. The annual report is not searchable on the website. Accessing data is impossible. Meanwhile the government says the master plan will not be released to the public – in a publicly managed hospital. ED wait times are among the worst in the state, and no comparative data year on year is available to the public to get clarity on their hospital. Meanwhile rumours swirl about government-mandated amalgamations. Minister, what is the government hiding about Mildura Base Public Hospital?

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:47): (523) The Angliss is a much-loved major hospital situated in Upper Ferntree Gully. It has been a mainstay of the community for over 80 years now, looking after us when we need it most, including my partner Tash and son George. The member for Monbulk and I know how important this hospital is to our community, and this is exactly why we continue to upgrade facilities, with an over \$100 million upgrade to deliver more beds, more elective surgery suites and better facilities for staff and patients. My question to the Minister for Health Infrastructure is: when can we expect to see major works start on this important project for our local community? I also wanted to take a moment to thank the wonderful healthcare and all other staff at the Angliss and of course across all of the Eastern Health sites that service our community. You are all incredible people, and at any opportunity I am always keen to say thank you. Early works have

now wrapped up, and I am excited to see major stuff happen and before too long the opening of the new facilities our community absolutely deserves. I am proud to be part of an Allan Labor government that continues to back in health care locally.

Berwick electorate

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:48): (524) My question is to the Minister for Water, and the question is: what information and advice does the minister have about the delays in the relocation of drains on Princes Highway near the intersection of Brunt and Whiteside roads in Beaconsfield and the time line for the completion of those works? We understand from information received from Cardinia council that the drainage installation in the central median strip has been delayed due to the clashes with underground infrastructure that now needs to be relocated. I have been informed that works are to recommence in approximately two weeks on the eastern side of the intersection. However, the relocation required to complete the balance of the works and remove the current traffic management are on the western side of the intersection, and there are currently no time lines for when this will occur. I can accept there will always be some inconvenience when it comes to roadworks; however, there has been little to no work done on the intersection since before Christmas. Meanwhile traffic eastbound is banking up well into Beaconsfield, causing huge 20- to 30-minute delays. Minister, we are seeking advice about these delays and the release of that information to the residents in the area so they can finally have an idea of when the traffic congestion will cease.

Point Cook electorate

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (14:49): (525) My question is for the Minister for Police. I would like to ask the minister when the latest information on the construction of the brand new police station on Point Cook Homestead Road will be released. The Allan Labor government is continuing to provide major investments towards Victoria Police. Over \$4.5 billion has been provided to ensure that police have the resources for fit-for-purpose facilities to make our community safe. One such facility is the co-located SES facility, which is just about to open in Point Cook, and I know the residents in the community that I represent are very excited to hear about the latest instalment of information.

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:50): (526) My question is to the Premier. Recent figures show that Coles and Woolworths are ripping people off. Last year Woolworths made a profit of 6 per cent on food, more than double that of major supermarkets in the US and the UK. It is outrageous. They are making billions while everyday people are struggling to even put food on the table. More and more of my constituents are contacting me worried about making ends meet, like Jo from West Melbourne, a retired teacher. She saved her whole life, but now in her retirement she is making more and more sacrifices, avoiding going out for meals or coffee with friends and she still worries how long her super will last. The thing is the Labor state government actually has the power to regulate supermarkets. They are just choosing not to. My question is: will Labor do anything to stop supermarket price gouging, or will they just leave my constituents, like Jo, to keep fending for themselves?

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:51): (527) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and I ask: what measures can be taken to improve the lighting at Fawkner, Gowrie and Upfield stations and in the surrounding areas? Recently a constituent of mine had to pick her grandson up at night at Fawkner station, and she found that the lighting could be considerably improved both at the station and along the paths leading to the station to improve the feeling of safety at night. I have had people raise similar concerns about the lighting at both Upfield and Gowrie stations, in surrounding areas and along paths leading to these stations. I have also witnessed the difficulty people face when dropping people off at Fawkner station. As there is no turning circle in the car park, people were reversing a considerable distance through the busy

commuter car park after dropping off their passenger. There also seems to be an inadequate amount of parking and parking for people with disabilities at Fawkner. Finally, several constituents have requested the installation of a bike Parkiteer at Upfield station. I look forward to your response.

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:52): (528) My question is to the Attorney-General. Will you legislate increased penalties for individuals who vandalise, damage or desecrate war memorials and cenotaphs or other assets of community significance and remembrance? After the devastating desecration of the Montrose War Memorial in 2023 as well as a series of vandalism attacks on a number of other war memorials across the Yarra Valley recently, including Seville War Memorial, our community has found the existing penalty is inadequate and provides no disincentive for vandalism of memorials that commemorate our service men and women. It is a serious question I ask on behalf of our community, especially members of the Lilydale and Mount Evelyn RSL sub-branches, seeking tougher penalties to try and stop this disgraceful vandalism of war memorials. I will keep working together with Lilydale and Mount Evelyn RSLs, and I thank presidents Bill Dobson and Matt Crymble, as well as Anthony McAleer and many other members, for the work they do in restoring local war memorials.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:53): (529) My question is for the Minister for Employment. Victoria's strong economy is continuing to deliver record job creation in this state and low unemployment, but there remain people in my community who are long-term unemployed. Can the minister please outline what strategies are in place to assist long-term unemployed people in Kororoit to help find them long-term sustainable employment?

Bills

Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:53): I am very pleased to be able to continue my contribution on this very important bill, and I am going to start where I left off. I am going to say it again and I am going to put it on Facebook, because this is what I am saying to my community: these provisions and regulations will mean for machetes that it is illegal to possess, carry or use one without lawful excuse. They cannot be sold to and cannot be purchased by a person under 18. It means that a lot of young people that we are seeing use these weapons will not be allowed to purchase them or have them sold to them. We know that a lot of the time retailers who may sell knives or other similar controlled weapons will have special technology in place to identify products that require proof-of-age cards and prevent them from inadvertently selling them to a minor. This way retailers who sell machetes as tools for legitimate activities – because, let us face it, there are legitimate activities that require a machete, such as for horticultural and agricultural purposes – can continue to do so. They just have to apply the same standards that are already in place to prevent breaches of this law to their products. If they do not – this is important – they are going to face a penalty of over \$3000 for selling a controlled weapon to a person that they know is under 18.

Importantly, what it means for young people who try to get their hands on a machete illegally is that they will also face a fine for illegally purchasing one. Importantly, for young people who are illegally trying to get their hands on machetes, it means they can face penalties of up to \$23,000 and a one-year jail term for carrying a machete without a lawful excuse. These penalties to some may seem harsh; I think they are pretty fair in fact. This goes a good way toward trying to stomp out the activity that has been going on in my electorate with machetes. It provides the deterrent that we need to young people looking to get their hands on these weapons to engage in serious crime, to harm innocent people in

communities. It will capture only a small minority of young people who are involved in this kind of criminal behaviour – this is not the vast majority of people in Melbourne’s west doing this, and it is really important to point that out. This is a small minority of people engaged in criminal behaviour.

This is such an important bill. I will certainly run out of time before I talk about firearms and what this bill goes towards introducing – some more good steps towards preventing and removing firearms from our communities. But I do say to the people in Melbourne’s west who have contacted me: we have heard you. This bill is for you.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:56): I rise to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. I say at the outset that this is a really important piece of legislation that we need to be debating. In November last year the Shadow Minister for Police the member for Berwick brought a private members bill into the Parliament that was very much about banning machetes from the streets, taking them off the streets, in this state, making sure that they were not available for sale and making sure that they were a prohibited weapon. At the time we had the government calling it a stunt.

I remind the government that they do not have complete control of all ideas. Ideas should come from everywhere, and that is the idea of having a Parliament with an opposition – to come up with good ideas that ultimately become legislation to make our state better. On that occasion we had the member for Berwick and the opposition bring an idea to the Parliament that was criticised by the government, that was called a joke, only to be up here today talking about looking at making machetes a controlled weapon and recognising – as all contributors in this debate have rightfully said – that machetes are a major, major, major problem in our state and a major problem on our streets.

We have had people say that with a home invasion, the frightening experience of being confronted with somebody with a machete in their hand – I mean, you could never think of something more frightening than having that happen, being woken in the middle of the night by someone with a machete. It is a horrible, horrible experience that people would never recover from, so we all agree on that. But the problem is that was back in November when we, the opposition, put forward the idea of machetes becoming a prohibited weapon banned from sale to ensure people could not buy them in retail stores and could not buy them online. What the government have done is they have effectively half baked the idea. They have come to this Parliament making them a controlled weapon. That does not preclude them from being purchased. It does not preclude them from being made available, and ultimately, although it might send a message that we do not like them, it certainly limits the ability to ban them by making them a prohibited weapon.

I support the reasoned amendment that the member for Berwick has moved, and I would hope that the government, in the spirit of what we are trying to do here today – that is, to take machetes off the streets and get them out of the hands of people that want to hurt others – would work with the opposition to ban machetes, because that is what we want to do. We want to take them from the hands of people that are trying to harm others. Again, I really would hope that we put politics aside and we get the government to work with the opposition to have them banned completely.

I do want to just turn to something local, and I have mentioned this a number of times. We had a horrific incident in my electorate back before the election where we had a young boy, Benjamin, who was attacked after leaving his school, Glen Eira College, on the way home, by youths, three teenagers, who were armed with machetes and box cutters. This was obviously a horrific situation. He was mowed down, he was dragged and he was kidnapped. He suffered horrific injuries that put him in intensive care. He was dragged 150 metres hanging from the door of a car before being run over and stabbed with one of these weapons. He suffered brain and spinal injuries and had to undergo surgery, and a bone in his ear was crushed. He was left fighting for his life after this incident, and he was placed in a coma for six days at the Royal Children’s Hospital. He also spent a further two months in that hospital.

Benjamin celebrated his 15th birthday in hospital with his parents by his bedside. Now Benjamin has thankfully returned to school. He went back to school just at the end of last year – they are slowly introducing him back to Glen Eira College – and he has spoken publicly about his ordeal. He said that, as we have heard, hopefully lightning never strikes twice, so he would hope this would never happen to him again, but he still has that element of fear. He still has that element of being psychologically harmed from this incident. He does not remember what happened, but he is still trying to get back to where he was before the events. He suffered injuries that no-one ever should in a time of life when a young person should be full of life and enjoying life – but in fact that did not happen for Benjamin.

At the time these three teenagers also went on an attack on other students around the area of Caulfield, near Caulfield Racecourse, and other areas as well. They were granted bail. One of the offenders, a 14-year-old boy, faces 70 charges relating to several armed robberies and multiple counts of theft. The 14-year-old and 15-year-old boys are alleged to have stolen a Volkswagen, which was used in the abduction of Benjamin, before the incident. On the day of the attack the pair also allegedly tried to steal a Mercedes-Benz, worth more than \$170,000, in Prahran. These are pretty serious crimes, serious offences. If you go out and take a machete with you, you are not going out there to make peace. So we need to ban them and get them off our streets.

We have seen an increase in crime. We see community safety as a real issue in our state, in our suburbs and on our streets. Certainly, Glen Eira is feeling that. We have seen a whole lot of incidents in terms of criminal activity. We have had a number of businesses in my area burnt down. We have all seen the tobacco shops that have been burnt down. We had a gym that was burnt down. We had a burger shop that was burnt down. We have had four businesses burnt down in the last six months in Caulfield. I cannot remember when anything like that of a criminal nature has happened. So there is criminal activity no doubt.

We need to ensure that community safety is an absolute priority. We have got to look at dangerous weapons and getting them out of the hands of criminals. We have got to not make it easier for these criminals but make it harder. We are looking at bail laws in terms of them being softened and the issues and results of that under this government, with people out on bail reoffending. We have seen the consequences of that. We cannot have that, and we have got to do everything we can to ensure that people are safe. Now, that does not mean that we lock people up and throw away the key. We have got to look at programs to stop young people offending in the first place. We have got to look at what turns particularly young people to a life of crime. But also, machetes are not used just by young people, might I say. Machetes are used by a lot of criminals in all kinds of ways to target and harm people.

So we have got to get them off our streets. We have got to ban them. We have got to ban them in terms of sale in our state. This bill will not do that. This bill falls short of that – although it is important for us to talk about it and it is important for us to move the dial. I acknowledge that the government have at least recognised that what they once saw as a stunt is now something that is serious, but let us go a little bit further. Let us not just acknowledge it as a serious problem; let us get a serious solution to the problem. Let us not just talk about how we deal with the sale of machetes; let us ban them altogether. They are not necessary. We do not have people in the suburbs using machetes for crop acreage reduction. There are plenty of tools to do that. If people want to use them on a farm, then that is fine too, but what we are seeing in Melbourne, what we are seeing on the streets, is not that. So I really plead with the government to actually do what is intended here. Let us get machetes off the streets. Let us do that in a bipartisan way. Enough of the politics. Let us ban machetes altogether and take them out of the hands of criminals.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (15:06): Today I rise to contribute on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. This bill supports Victoria Police to maintain community safety by reasonably expanding police powers in relation to the serving of FPOs – that is, firearm prohibition orders. It also contains an important amendment to the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to clarify that a machete is a knife and therefore a controlled weapon for the purposes of this act.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister for Police, who has just come into the chamber and is at the table, and of course his staff for all the work that they have done on this bill. There is a lot of work that has been done, and I really appreciate that this bill is now before the house. I have had many discussions with the Minister for Police about machetes in the past, in particular about some incidents that have gone on in my electorate of Melton. I am very pleased to speak on this bill today.

I will go first to the reasoned amendment that was raised by the member for Berwick. Clearly I do not accept and I do not think there is any need to accept that amendment. I think it is just a delaying of the passing of this bill before the house. I think one thing that we need to stress is that VicPol were heavily consulted. Both VicPol and the Police Association Victoria were supportive of this bill, and in fact VicPol were the ones that requested this bill. They did not seek prohibitive legislation; they wanted this controlled weapon legislation, so again this government is working with our fantastic police force to deliver what they need to try and keep our communities safe.

We have heard a number of times during this debate that legally a machete is considered a knife and therefore it is a controlled weapon. When you look up what exactly a machete is, you quickly learn that it is a broad, heavy knife used as an implement or weapon from Central America and the Caribbean. It has indeed a broad range of uses as an agricultural tool, similar to that of an axe here in Australia. Crops such as rice, sugarcane, corn, barley, buckwheat, oats and many others can be easily harvested with a machete. But as we have seen, the ease with which a tool becomes a weapon in the eyes of those seeking to turn a profit is remarkable. I know, and it has been raised, that these machetes are being sold at local markets. I think down at the Laverton Market they were selling them on a regular basis, and it is quite astounding that that was happening.

Of course when you drive through Melton and the Melton electorate you cannot help but notice the lack of sugarcane in our streets and in the paddocks around Melton. I do not see any reason for people in Melton to have a machete, because as I say there is not much sugarcane in our area. There is no legitimate reason for anyone in Melton to carry a machete. I cannot see any reason for it, let alone anywhere else in the state, unless you are a butcher or something like that who needs to chop meat. It beggars belief that anyone would claim self-defence as a reason to carry one. If you are carrying a machete, clearly your aim is to harm someone or even to kill someone. That can be the only reason why you would want to carry one.

Look, I might be one of the few members in this Parliament and in this chamber that has seen the damage caused by a machete to a human body. I can go back to my days as a paramedic through the 1980s and 90s, when I saw absolute carnage across the western suburbs as a result of the use of machetes. These are weapons designed not to stab but to chop people up, to chop things up. Machetes hack and they chop, and they are simple weapons that can kill. I have seen defensive wounds where people have put their arms up above their head to protect themselves from being chopped with a machete and I have seen arms amputated, arms cut to the bone, nerves cut. Then if you picture a watermelon being split by a machete, picture the head, a human skull, being hit by a machete and what it would do to a human skull, and I can assure you it is not a nice view when you see that happen. Unfortunately during the 1980s and 90s I did see that happen in the western suburbs. So again I can only strongly support this bill in regard to reducing and stopping the purchase and the use of these particular weapons. As I say, these are weapons that in the wrong hands are designed to kill.

This bill will make it criminal and enforceable by Victoria Police, and this bill will expand the powers of VicPol, again as I raised earlier on, in regard to serving firearm prohibition orders, or FPOs, on a particular individual. An FPO is only served when the Chief Commissioner of Police believes that in order to protect the public a person should not have access to a firearm or a firearm-related item. This could be based on an individual's criminal history or that of their associates, on their behaviour or on criminal intelligence. Of course people that legitimately own firearms will not be caught up in these orders; it is only about people that align themselves with criminals or have a criminal history themselves. The FPO scheme is a proactive way for VicPol to keep violence and other criminal activity

off our streets, and we all want that. We all want our communities to be safe and we all want criminal activity to be reduced. This bill will allow VicPol to serve these FPOs in a prompt and efficient manner.

When you have 16-year-olds or 15-year-olds or 14-year-olds going about their business in their local suburbs brandishing machetes at each other, it is clear that there is going to be a long list of failures that can be pointed at and a long list of damages that could also be pointed at. We had an incident in Melton only a few weeks ago where the police had to shut down the Woodgrove shopping centre for 30 minutes because two or three youths decided that they were going to attack each other with knives that I think they took from the local Woolworths store within the shopping centre. Thank God nothing eventuated; the police handled the matter very quickly and everyone was safe. But as an outcome of that Woolworths have decided I think across 70 of their stores not to stock knives anymore. I do not know which knives they are referring to, but I am assuming it is in their homewares section. So now when I go to Woolworths at Woodgrove I will probably have to go to the counter and ask for my new cheese knife set over the counter and I will have to produce evidence that I am a person that is capable of being responsible with a cheese knife set. I thought it was a bit of an overreaction, but I understand where they are coming from; it is about the safety of people, and I suppose Woolworths are trying to send a strong message.

I should say that one of the other things that came to mind when I was thinking about this bill was that it is almost like the big fish that got away – you know, those stories that men tell about how they caught the biggest fish and all this sort of stuff. But I thought back to the *Crocodile Dundee* movie where the character in the States pulled out the knife and Paul Hogan says, ‘That’s not a knife.’ So what does he do? He whips out a big bowie knife and he says, ‘That’s a knife.’ To me that is almost the culture around machetes, where these kids have got them stuffed down their pants and they wear these baggy pants so they can disguise what they are carrying, and it is almost like they pull their machete out when they are going to try and violate someone and they say, ‘That’s a knife.’ Well, guess what, it is deemed to be a knife now under this legislation, and I am pleased to say that this government is acting on it to keep our communities safe.

I extend my thanks and appreciation to our VicPol members. They do an amazing job every day under extreme circumstances sometimes. They work really hard to deter youths, and most of them are male youths, in regard to using these types of weapons. There are a lot of prevention programs, they do a lot of community work, but unfortunately there is still an element of our community that think that they can resort to using these particular weapons to do damage against some of their peers or against some of their, I suppose, opponents as they may see it. This is a really important bill. I do not see any need for the reasoned amendment, and I commend the bill to the house.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (15:16): Thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak on this bill, the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. I have been eagerly awaiting legislation in this space. This bill represents a significant step in addressing public safety concerns in my electorate and across Victoria and ensuring the effective enforcement of laws aimed at protecting our communities. However, like most legislation introduced by those opposite, it sounds good but misses the issue at hand.

The bill expands police powers to serve a firearm prohibition order, otherwise known as an FPO, on an individual after an FPO is made by the Chief Commissioner of Police. The intention behind these provisions is clear: to prevent individuals who pose a threat to public safety from obtaining firearms. However, while it is essential to ensure that the FPOs are effectively served, we must also safeguard against potential abuses of power. I welcome the safeguards, such as stipulated criteria, procedural protections and court-supervised search warrants to prevent the misuse of these powers. It is imperative that these safeguards are rigorously enforced to uphold the principles of justice and fairness in our state.

Additionally, I especially welcome the amendments to the Control of Weapons Act 1990, specifically regarding the classification of machetes as controlled weapons. While the amendment bill seeks to

clarify the status of machetes under the law, I am reticent to say whether this will actually affect the possession of illegal machetes. As the Minister for Police claimed in his second-reading speech, machetes are knives and therefore are already defined as a controlled weapon under the act.

This bill is especially important and close to my heart because of the story of just one man whose life was tragically cut short at the hand of a thug wielding a machete in a senseless act of violence just outside of my electorate, in Doncaster East. On behalf of him and his family I am here to demand justice, accountability and change. Although there was a significant amount of press attention, the story of Dr Ash Gordon's murder is not just a headline, it is a stark reminder of the failures within our state government and our justice system. It is a story that echoes the pain and frustration of so many in my community who have been touched by reckless and senseless violence and have been met with the cold, silent shoulder of a government that does not have its priorities right, of a government that did not listen. To quote those closest to Ash:

It's an absolute disgrace to mankind to do something to someone so, so wonderful and the world is a worse place now because he's been taken from us. Not only us, but the wider community ...

Another person said:

His patients he loved so much, he poured his heart and soul into his work and I hope like hell – you are –

... caught and justice is served to my brother.

Another said:

We just need harsh punishments to come in and for these people to be caught.

Another said:

... He was such a cheeky, lighthearted, fun person. He gave his all to everyone in his family, in his job

...

He was caring, he was so caring.

To quote his patients:

He was one of the more compassionate doctors I've seen.

And:

My elderly mother would come here from out of state just to see him because he was so good to her ...

But amidst the grief and the anger this was to me a call to action. Dr Gordon's death cannot be in vain. We cannot simply mourn his loss and move on. We must demand accountability from those responsible for his murder, but we must also demand accountability from our government and from our justice system because, as has been reported, the truth of it is this: one of the accused perpetrators was out on bail at the time of Dr Gordon's death. There were warning signs, and this tragedy could have been prevented.

I will repeat it so that those opposite can hear: the accused perpetrator was out on bail when he committed this offence. I have spoken to the family affected, who were subject to a machete attack and who reached out to me when they realised that that same person that attacked their family member was out on bail, thanks to the Allan government and their weak bail laws. This is what the family said to me, and I quote:

Our heart breaks for Ash's family and loved ones during this ... time.

These are their words, not mine:

The Allan government and the justice system have blood on their hands, and ultimately should be held accountable.

We have seen the statistics – rising rates of violent crime and a broken system in desperate need of reform – so we must ask ourselves: how many more lives must be lost before we take action? How many more families must suffer before we demand change? How many more tragedies like Dr Gordon’s murder will it take for us to say enough is enough? That is why the bill introduced by the member for Malvern, the Bail Amendment (Indictable Offences Whilst on Bail) Bill 2024, is so important. The bill, as summed up so eloquently by the member for Malvern, does the following: if you abuse the privilege of bail by committing further offences, you should face a tougher test to get bail again. Well, what a simple proposition. Who could oppose this basic, commonsense proposal –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, with respect to the speaker on her feet, I ask you to bring her back to the substance of the bill at hand.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): The member has strayed from the substance of the bill, which relates to firearms orders and machetes. I ask her to come back to the bill.

Chris Crewther: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I note that she is referencing the other bill in the context of talking about the machetes bill. The point of order is that she is referencing the bail bill with reference to the machetes bill that is being discussed at this moment, so I do not think she has strayed from the bill in question.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): I have ruled that the member come back to the bill.

Nicole WERNER: When those opposite lie to the Victorian people, the Victorian people trust them less, so why should it be different for violent criminals?

To the essence of this, as we know, those opposite’s bail amendment bill will make it easier for repeat offenders to get bail again, repeat offenders like the alleged murderer in this case. So I call upon the government to listen to the cries of the victims, to heed the warnings of those who have suffered and to take more meaningful action to reform our justice system and address the causes of this crime. In the words of Dr Gordon’s sister Natalie:

We just need harsh punishments to come in and for these people to be caught.

Let us honour her plea, let us honour Dr Gordon’s memory and let us pass some good legislation on this critical issue.

I think in particular the members for Greenvale, Laverton and South Barwon need to hang their heads in shame, because when they last had a chance to speak on this bill to ban the machete, late last November, they took the opportunity not to support the bill and not to support the banning of machetes but instead to speak against it. I wonder if the members for Greenvale, Laverton and South Barwon, who are so quick to defend criminals and so slow to defend our most vulnerable, will be voting. I wonder: does it hang upon their conscience –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I note the member did use unparliamentary language before. The word ‘lie’ is unparliamentary.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage): I ask the member to consider her language.

Nicole WERNER: Well, okay. Thank you, Acting Speaker. We presented a near identical bill to this place back in November and they spoke against it and voted against it. That is absolutely relevant. So does it hang upon their conscience – the blood that is spilled from machete crime since that day in November when they opposed the very same bill that we put to Parliament? Does it? There have been a swathe of machete attacks since that bill has come to this Parliament, and they could have been prevented. It beggars belief.

The member for Laverton reiterated earlier that we should not be playing politics on this issue. Let us not forget when the member for Laverton spoke on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes)

Amendment Bill 2024. What did she speak about? The member for Bulleen, she said, has gone to an election twice in this place on being tough on crime. The member for Laverton wants to lecture us about playing politics, but when she gets an opportunity to speak on crime she speaks about elections. So no, I will not take a lecture from those opposite about playing politics when that is all they do each and every day when they come into this place.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:25): Jeez, I am not sure how to follow that. It was a bit of a journey. I am not sure where we ended up. I would just like to make the point, though, that the member for Bulleen did go to two elections being tough on crime. How did that go for him? I think you have got 19 members over there. It went well. It is fantastic to rise this afternoon to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024.

At the outset on this bill, I would like to reiterate what I said earlier in the week: community safety is and always will be the number one priority for the Allan Labor government. Indeed that is exactly what this bill goes to. It will play an integral role in our government's commitment to public safety, as it seeks to extend police powers in relation to serving firearm prohibition orders. It also seeks to clarify that a machete is a knife and therefore a controlled weapon for the purposes of this bill. We stand here speaking in favour of this bill after significant consultation with the community but also, really importantly, with Victoria Police. I would like to commend the Minister for Police, who is at the table, for that consultation.

This is what Victoria Police has asked for. This is what Victoria Police has asked for to keep our community safe. And what we will not do – what we will never do – is come into this place and politicise the safety of the Victorian community. We will never come into this place and politicise the safety of the Victorian community – unlike the member for Berwick, who came in here this morning and not only moved an amendment that seeks to amend nothing, that only seeks to delay this legislation and put the safety of the Victorian community at risk, but indeed undermines the Victorian police force and undermines those exact people that are there to keep our community safe. I will reiterate once again that this bill was born out of consultation with Victoria Police after they had told us and told the minister who is at the table that this is exactly what they need to keep our communities safe.

The bill introduces essential amendments to two critical pieces of legislation. They are the Firearms Act 1996 and the Control of Weapons Act 1990. The proposed changes are twofold. Firstly, they aim to expand police powers to serve firearm prohibition orders, enhancing our law enforcement's ability to act swiftly and effectively against those who pose a risk to our society. Secondly, the bill seeks to clarify the classification of machetes as controlled weapons, addressing a widespread misconception and ensuring adherence to existing laws regarding their sale and possession.

It is important, as other speakers have noted, at this point to address that there are in some very limited cases legitimate uses for machetes by farmers. But as the member for Melton said earlier in his contribution, just like Melton, if you come out to Tarneit or Hoppers Crossing, you are not going to find any sugarcane. In fact you are not going to find any agricultural industry that you will need the use of a machete for.

I know that that surprises the member for Brighton. He has not been out my way, but that is indeed the case. Unfortunately, that has not stopped some in our community from possessing this weapon, and indeed only last year we had an incredibly tragic event in my community of Tarneit where there was an attack on a 16-year-old boy by a gang using machetes. The boy sustained significant injuries, significant defence wounds and significant psychological trauma, and I will say as I stand here that he was quite lucky to survive. That is the reason – sorry, that is not in isolation the reason, but that contributes to the reason that we have done this piece of consultation with Victoria Police and now come into this chamber with the proposed amendments to the acts that I spoke of earlier. It is all about community safety. It is all about keeping our community safe.

On that point of community safety, as I said earlier, it is, always has been and always will be the number one priority of the Allan Labor government, and the proof is in the pudding with that. Whilst those opposite – I mean, they are not quite opposite to me anymore as we occupy half of their benches. But unlike the opposition, we do not come in here to politicise these matters. We just get on with the job of keeping Victorians safe. The recent report on government services shows we have more police on the beat than any other state or territory in Australia, and of the more than 3600 additional police funded by the Victorian government, 144 of them have been deployed to the Westgate division, which of course services my community of Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing.

Since 2015–16 the Allan Labor government has invested over \$6.3 million in 37 crime prevention grants to improve community safety in the Wyndham local area – \$6.3 million. This may include grants to projects that cover Wyndham and other local government areas. In the recent 2023–24 budget we provided \$13.6 million in funding to intervene early in youth offending by extending the youth crime prevention program, which operates in 14 LGAs across the state, including the City of Wyndham, where my communities of Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing are. The youth crime prevention program in the City of Wyndham is operated by the Centre for Multicultural Youth through their Change It Up program, providing intensive support to young people who are at risk of involvement in the youth justice system, giving them the tools they need to get back on track.

Last September I attended the Wyndham community safety grant launch, and the following are the successful recipients. The Wyndham Community and Education Centre received \$75,000 for their Horizons: Empowering Multicultural Youth for Success project, which aims to empower youth from diverse backgrounds to cultivate a strong sense of identity and belonging, as well as their Karuna Compassion in Action Incorporated, which received \$60,000 for their Wyndham Karen Youth project, and there were many more.

As I said at the beginning of my contribution, we will never, ever come into this place like the member for Berwick did at the beginning of this debate or indeed like the member for Warrandyte did just before I rose to my feet. We will never ever come into this place and seek to politicise community safety, because it is so much more important than cheap political games. I know from consultation with my community how important legislation like this is. I know how important it is to my community that the Allan Labor government continues to get on with keeping the Victorian community safe, as it always has. This is an incredibly important step in just that, and I commend the legislation to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:35): I rise to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. This debate is a difficult debate. It is a difficult debate about issues that I know all of us in this chamber are concerned about, and we have seen over time deep concerns in our community about safety, so throughout this debate a number of members have made important contributions about crimes that have occurred in their communities. Only this week some terrible crimes occurred in my community in Hampton – shocking crimes where there were people, families, who were subjected to home invasion. Unfortunately it was not the only instance where this has occurred. It has been ongoing. We have seen members across both sides of the chamber speak to those matters and speak to these incidents occurring across their communities.

It is important when we talk about these issues that we do it with consideration and we do it with the spirit that it should be spoken about, and that is to speak on behalf of the community and the victims, those who have been affected, and talk about what we can do as a Parliament to make sure that people are safe. At the end of the day that is what we all want, isn't it? It is safety for our broader community. We want to make sure that people are safe in their homes and on their streets. I know as I look across the chamber and see the Minister for Police, I am sure both sides of this chamber want to ensure that we have a level of community safety where people feel safe in their homes – not just are safe in their homes but they feel safe in their homes – and this bill is a measure to increase safety for the community in terms of control of machete weapons.

Sadly, it would be fair to say that crimes involving machetes have increased terribly. They are crimes that have, I think, scared the community in a way that has certainly caused increasing concern for all Victorians. The idea that you could have someone break into your home is an unimaginable fear. It is unimaginable. As a father of young children, and I am sure for every parent of young children, the idea of someone coming into your home while you are asleep is one of the scariest things that you can imagine. To know that they may be carrying a machete scares the life out of you, honestly – it absolutely scares the life out of you. So when these crimes actually occur and when those fears become a reality – when you see videos of those crimes and you see pictures of those crimes – as a Victorian you are just shocked to the core that these crimes have occurred. So I am sure I say on behalf of every member that we want to do everything we possibly can to make sure that these crimes do not occur, that they do not happen to anybody.

I have spoken about it before in this place but there was quite a shocking incident near Bay Street in Brighton where a father went out to go for a morning swim in his back pool and left the back door open. It was about 7 o'clock in the morning. It probably was not an uncommon thing, you know – Dad went out to have a swim in the morning before heading off to work, and while he did two people came in through the back door. It is not an uncommon thing to think that if you go out into your backyard you can leave your back door unlocked. The partner of the daughter of the home owner walked out of his bedroom and into the kitchen, and there were two home invaders standing there with machetes. When you talk to the families, the victims, after an incident like that, it really shakes you in terms of how they are. Your immediate thoughts go to the victims, of course they do. Your first thoughts are about understanding if they are okay. But you do immediately think, 'Where else is this happening? Could this happen again? Who else could be victims of such a crime?'

Knowing crimes of that nature occur in our community certainly brings fear to your mind. I do not think for any Victorian that should be part of their thinking. No Victorian wants to think that it is possible for these crimes to occur, so it is important in relation to this bill and in relation to the law that we protect the community from these crimes occurring. Whether it be increasing penalties, whether it be enhancing the law or whether it be ensuring our bail system works and acts as a deterrent, all of these measures are important. But so too are police resources, and police resourcing is an issue in my community. I say that in as constructive a way as possible.

My community feels very, very strongly that the local police in our community do an incredible job. Many of the police force that are located in our community are known to the community through their community work and through their community engagement. We have a community forum next Tuesday night, which is a fantastic opportunity for Bayside people to speak to police to understand work that is going on in our community. I would strongly recommend to anybody in Bayside that they go down to that community forum in Sandringham. The community know how hard the local cops are working in our community, but we do need to also point out that we are seeking increased resourcing in our community, and I say that to the minister in as constructive a way as possible.

I have spoken previously about the need for an additional police station. It is something that my community feels very strongly about, and so they should. Before the election many people in my community raised this, and we took a policy to the election of a new police station in Brighton. Post the election I have run petitions, surveys and everything that you would expect a member to do, and thousands of people have called for that increased resource. I say that in a constructive way, and I do hope the minister takes my comments in that way. They are not in any way to detract from the work of our local police, because our community, to a man and a woman, knows how hard the police in our community work. We engage with the local cops in a fantastic way all the time.

I will give a second shout-out to the community forum next Tuesday evening in Sandringham, a really great opportunity for Bayside people to come to the Sandringham Yacht Club, I believe it is, and to talk to the local police about their work, their programs and what they have been doing and to ask questions. It is great for people in our community to meet the people who are protecting them and put

a name to a face – nothing could be better than that – and work together in good spirit. I certainly encourage everybody in our community to do that.

But in relation to the bill, it is important that we ensure that our laws fully protect us – that is what they are there for – and machete crimes have increased. They are concerning. Not only has there been a 68-burglary-a-day average in recent times, but we are seeing these machete crimes, so it is important that the government implement laws that protect us from these most heinous crimes, not just the home invasions but where these types of violent, violent weapons are used. I am sure, as the shadow has mentioned, that there are ways that the coalition has put forward that we could have more fulsome protections in relation to these weapons and the laws more generally. This week we have had a debate in this place about bail laws and ensuring that our bail laws are more fulsome. We had a question in question time about that very issue today. But this bill does something, and we need to as a Parliament do something. We must do something to protect our community from these crimes. These new laws will do something, and it is important that we do to protect our community.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:46): I rise to speak on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. In doing so I would like to acknowledge and commend the work of the Minister for Police, who is at the table, his office, the department and Victoria Police for their respective work in bringing this bill to the Parliament. All Victorians deserve and have the right to feel safe in their homes, communities and workplaces, and as a government and indeed as a Parliament we should be working every day towards helping make Victoria a safer place that is free from violence, family violence, prejudice, hate, local crime and the fear of crime. Community safety is an essential part of our individual and collective wellbeing and is a critical pillar for supporting and fostering healthy and sustainable communities. We know that every day in any weather and at any hour our hardworking Victoria Police officers are out there patrolling the front line, often putting themselves at risk to keep all of us in the community safe. In that respect I would particularly like to thank all of the members of Victoria Police and their families for the service they provide to the state but particularly those from Fawkner police station and Brunswick police station, who service my community.

That is also why since 2014 we have continued to make record investments of more than \$4.5 billion in Victoria Police to deliver Victorians the modern world-class policing services that they deserve. This thus far has helped us deliver almost \$1 billion towards new and upgraded police stations across the state; more than 3600 additional police officers since 2014, including funding for an extra 502 police officers and 50 PSOs through the recent budget; and \$214 million in funding to roll out tasers to all frontline police officers and PSOs, ensuring they have nonlethal tools at the disposal to respond to violent and dynamic offenders. Significant investments and initiatives towards crime prevention and early intervention issues have also been provided, which I will touch on shortly.

The latest crime statistics show that these investments have been playing a role in stabilising the offence rate following a period of lower crime rates while more people were at home during the height of the pandemic, with the offence rate now remaining below 2019 levels. In my community of Merri-bek crime agency statistics show that the criminal incident rate per 100,000 population remains lower than prepandemic levels, with a rate of 5995 in 2019, and as of September 2023 we are experiencing an even lower rate of 5472. In terms of total criminal incidents for Merri-bek in 2019 it was 10,752, and in 2023 as of September it was recorded at 9989.

However, of course notwithstanding these investments we know we can always keep doing more to keep our community safe, particularly when it comes to preventing dangerous weapons from coming into the hands of potentially dangerous people, including through the reforms and measures contained in this very bill. In this respect I draw the house's attention to the IBAC ministerial report pursuant to the Firearms Act 1996 that was tabled in this house in November 2023. Firearms prohibition orders were introduced in Victoria in May 2018, and the scheme operates together with the existing prohibited person scheme to protect the community and reduce firearm-related crime by targeting those that possess, use or carry firearms for unlawful purposes. Upon the scheme's introduction the

Chief Commissioner of Police referred to it as a game changer in Victoria Police's continued efforts to disrupt organised crime in particular. Since its inception the police have issued over 2200 FPOs to violent offenders, serious youth offenders, outlaw motorcycle gangs, crime groups and counterterrorism persons of interest. However, IBAC's review and report on the measures identified a number of variables that may impact Victoria Police's timely and efficient serving of an FPO to the FPO subject.

Whilst IBAC accepted that the reasons for the delay in service of an FPO can be justified in certain circumstances, IBAC also observed that the service of an FPO must be given priority by Victoria Police, because an FPO is made on the basis of an affirmative conclusion by the chief commissioner that there is a serious risk that the FPO subject will come into possession of a firearm in circumstances where the firearm may endanger public peace and safety. The IBAC report went to Victoria Police, and it has identified three classes of individuals whom it has particular difficulty serving FPOs to. They include individuals who actively avoid the service of their FPO, individuals whose whereabouts are unknown and prisoners in detention or individuals in immigration detention who refuse a visit from a police officer for the purpose of receiving an FPO, especially those where it is important that the FPO is served upon their release from detention.

Essentially, under the current laws, the FPO must be served in person, which can be difficult for police when an individual is actively evading service. That is why this house has introduced amendments to the Firearms Act 1996 to support Victoria Police maintaining community safety by expanding police powers in relation to serving these firearm prohibition orders. Building on what already are in this state some of the strongest firearm controls in the world, this will enable police to stop a person in a public place and direct that they remain there or accompany them to a police station or other safe place for up to 2 hours for the purposes of serving an FPO. Police will also be able to apply to a magistrate for a warrant to enter a premises to search for and serve a person with an FPO. Where an individual in detention has declined a visit by a police officer, police will also be able to serve an FPO on that person via registered post.

These changes are what police have told us they need – they asked for them – to ensure that this game-changing scheme continues to provide police with the powers they need to keep our communities safe. This bill also includes safeguards so that additional powers to serve FPOs on an individual are exercised only when necessary and never as a first resort and not merely because it is more convenient for police. Following consultation with the Attorney-General and other legal stakeholders, the bill will require the chief commissioner to report as separate information any power or duty exercised against an individual under the age of 18 years, which is authorised only in exceptional circumstances. This additional reporting obligation will ensure that the government maintains appropriate and proportionate visibility of these powers and that the safeguards are working as intended.

Additionally, the bill also contains an amendment to the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to clarify that a machete is a knife and therefore a controlled weapon for the purposes of the act. By clarifying the definition of 'controlled weapon', the legal status of machetes will be absolutely clear: they cannot be possessed, carried or used without lawful excuse or be sold to anyone under 18 years of age. It clarifies to traders that machetes are controlled weapons and that proof of age must be checked before the sale to make sure machetes do not end up in the hands of young people whilst making an appropriate distinction for farmers and others who do have legitimate reasons to use them.

When combined, the measures in the bill will crack down on organised crime and weapons sales by making it easier for the police to serve FPOs and ensuring that there is no doubt that a machete is a controlled weapon. Stakeholders consulted on the development of this bill included Victoria Police, IBAC, Victoria Legal Aid, the Commission for Children and Young People, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus policy working group, the Magistrates' Court, the Children's Court and the Victorian Firearms Consultative Committee.

But along with these new measures, we know that ultimately the best way to keep Victorian communities safe is to work to address the root causes of crime. This means that we must also work to tackle disadvantage and inequality and other risk factors, including education, employment and sustainable housing and connections to family, community and culture. That is why we have continued to invest in a range of community and crime prevention measures since we were elected in 2014, particularly through the rollout of Victoria's youth strategy, more than \$100 million towards more than 900 initiatives to prevent youth crime, \$40 million specifically for the youth crime prevention program and \$12 million towards the Aboriginal youth cautioning program to embed youth outreach.

That is also why things like free kinder; Best Start, Best Life; free TAFE; the Big Build and apprenticeship pathways; upgrading every primary and secondary school; the Big Housing Build – community, social and affordable housing; building better local sporting facilities; Get Active Kids sport vouchers – all these things and more – will play such a vitally important role in making communities safe in the future. While stronger powers provided through this bill are critical to keeping our communities safe today and tomorrow, it will be these lasting legacy investments that will stand the test of time for a safer community down the track.

It was advocacy around youth issues and youth affairs that very much got me interested in public policy and youth issues. As a young person growing up in Coburg, along with Jeff Kennett's decision to close around a dozen schools in my community – how did that turn out for youth justice? – it was the fact that my community did not have a dedicated multipurpose council-run youth facility that sparked my advocacy. After getting involved in my local youth action committee, we helped build a campaign which went on to become known as the Oxygen youth project, a project and campaign that was all about building breathing spaces for young faces. Ultimately we went on to successfully open a hub in 2013, and we just celebrated the 10-year anniversary actually, just recently, with the Minister for Youth Justice, who attended the event too. I also visited Oxygen again on 12 August 2023 with the Minister for Youth to meet with the local youth ambassadors to commend them on their ongoing work, including Shireen, Natalia, Sihaam, Meena, Henry, Marlie and Naim. The Oxygen legacy also will stand the test of time, because the 'Y' in Oxygen represents the legacy of gen Y to future generations that are provided through the services of that hub.

There are so many other organisations in my community I would also like to acknowledge. I have done a lot of work closely with Les Twentymen over the years to establish Oxygen but also Youth Activating Youth, that was established in 2014 by local leaders Ali Ahmed and Ahmed Hassan. Ahmed actually was the Victorian Australian of the Year a couple of years ago and still does tremendous work. YAY has supported over 15,000 young people through all of its respective programs and placed 450 young people into jobs. I would like to commend Youth Projects, including Melanie Raymond, Monica Gould, Ben Vasiliou and all the staff there. I commend the bill.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (15:56): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

I interrupt the debate today because in less than four months Israel has killed 29,313 people – Palestinians in Gaza. Another 7000 are missing beneath the rubble. Another 69,333 Palestinians have been injured. We are not talking about a bruise or a scratch; we are talking about people barely holding onto life. We are talking about the more than 1000 children who have had one or both legs amputated without anaesthetic. Imagine that. Imagine your child. Thousands more have been killed or injured in the West Bank. Israel has destroyed every single hospital, 37 of them.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Richmond that this procedural debate is about the reason to adjourn. We are not debating something else.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: I am providing this information as context as to why it is so important that we urgently interrupt business today, because schools and hospitals have been razed to the ground and because Israel has manufactured a famine and denied access to drinking water and medical supplies.

Tens of thousands of children are on the brink of starvation, and Israel is preparing right now for a catastrophic ground invasion of Rafah, where 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering in an area that is just twice the size of the CBD. They are living in unbelievable fear. They have nowhere to go, so I move to interrupt this debate because we should all be asking ourselves: how do we stop this? This Parliament must be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Is there anything more urgent right now?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, with respect I understand that the member has moved to adjourn debate, but it is not an opportunity for the house to ask questions. Just to understand, it is a procedural matter and I ask you to draw the member back to the substance of what the member is proposing.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would encourage the member to keep her comments to the reason for the adjournment and stay there as close as possible.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: The reason for this adjournment is because there is nothing more urgent to discuss right now than the Victorian Labor government's relationship with Israel during a potential genocide. We do know some things, but we need to know more. We know that the Victorian Labor government has signed an agreement with the Israeli defence ministry to support the development and manufacture of military equipment, but the details of this agreement are secret. We need to know more, and that is why I am interrupting business today. We need to interrupt business now to give the Labor government the chance to explain to the Victorian public what the MOU contains and why they have refused until now to cancel their agreement with the Israeli military.

We also know that as part of a \$6 million defence program the Victorian state government formed a partnership with Elbit, Israel's largest weapons manufacturer. This is to drive research, development and commercialisation of –

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, notwithstanding the seriousness of the issues the member is raising, she has strayed from the procedural nature of this debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. I appreciate some context, but bring it back, please.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: It is essential that we interrupt business right now because Victorians need to hear from the government about the nature of these relationships. I moved to interrupt business because my grandfather escaped the worst of the anti-Jewish pogroms in Ukraine, in Odessa, which was formerly Russia, and the trauma of antisemitism is in my blood. It compels me to fight with everything that I have got to stop the persecution, to stop the death and to stop the annihilation of Palestinian people.

It is essential that we interrupt debate today to give the government the opportunity to review their position in light of these atrocities and because today community and social service workers are walking out of the job to demand that our government stop enabling Israel. I interrupt business today in solidarity with them because, while our communities seethe with horror, they see the government continuing on with business as usual.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (16:01): I rise to oppose the motion from the Greens to interrupt business in this procedural motion and to make it very clear that earlier this week the government business program was voted on and was adopted by this house. That business program includes the debate on the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. It also deals with the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024 and, up until just moments ago, a very serious debate on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024, a bill which I have responsibility for as Minister for Police and which I know very many members in this place have spoken on in very heartfelt ways, in very serious ways, about the importance of the changes that we need to make in relation to that bill, and that goes

through some broader issues. But bringing that back, it is about a government business program that has been adopted by this house this week, that has been voted on and that has been the work of the Parliament this week and today, and that work needs to continue.

We have seen interruptions to the business program, interruptions to the running of this place, by the member for Richmond and some of her fellow members that have not complied with the standing orders of this place. At this moment in time perhaps some are starting to work out how business is conducted in this chamber and are making sure that in this procedural motion there is an effective way in which they seek to raise issues and seek to interrupt business. That is why we are having this debate and this discussion now, not doing it in ways that over the past week have seen the suspension of the member for Richmond and the suspension of other members by the Speaker in relation to interrupting business in ways that do not comply with the running of this house.

So I do say that in this debate now, this is the way at the very least that we go about business in this place. But I put on the record again that the government does not support the procedural motion being put by the member for Richmond. Regardless of the merits or the desire to have a debate or a discussion, whatever the content, the house has made a decision this week and voted on the government's business program. The matters that are before the house require a vote before the conclusion of business today. The matters before the house in debate include amendments that have been moved by those opposite, and it is critical that we continue to pursue those matters. That is why the government does not support that procedural motion. It is why the government wants to return to the business program. There are vital matters that need to be considered, need to be debated and need to be voted on before the house rises today, and of course the rising of the house has been determined by the Leader of the House through this week. So it is important that we return to debate on the matters that are before us and that have been determined by this house through this week.

I would further say on the matters that have been raised by the member for Richmond that there is a time and a place for a debate and a discussion on them, but it is not in this format, it is not in this forum and it is not now. At this time we seek to debate and discuss the bills before the house, the matters that have been determined by the house this week, and to vote on them, and that is appropriate.

I call on the opposition and I call on other members of this place to support a return to the debate on the bills before the house – bills that include amendments that have been moved by those opposite – so we can continue the debate and the important discussions. There are people who have also attended here today to hear the debate on those matters. We have members that are still listed to speak on those matters – they are important matters. I would encourage those opposite, and I encourage the opposition in particular, to support the continuation of the business program and the debates before the house, particularly in relation to the matters that have been raised and moved by the member for Berwick so we can have further consideration and debate on those matters and vote on them before business concludes in the house. I know that my colleagues will speak further to these matters, and I look forward to their contributions in relation to this debate. I reiterate that the procedural motion is not supported. We have business in this house that needs to be concluded and legislation before this house, and we need to get back to it as soon as possible.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:06): I rise to make some comments about the political stunt that the Greens have tried to make today in this Parliament at a time when we are talking about safety on our streets here in Melbourne and dealing with machete crimes, which many people have been traumatised by and killed by. My community, the Jewish community, are feeling very unsafe. It is a real issue. I certainly understand that all communities need to feel safe. We need to restore social cohesion in this great city of Melbourne, and that is why it is really important for us to take the temperature gauge down and not use Parliament for political stunts. We should not be seeking to adjourn the debate here for political stunts. This is effectively the DNA of the Greens. This is what the Greens have done. They continue to use Parliament for political stunts. Many Jews have been traumatised since 7 October, when 1200 Jews were killed in Israel and 250 hostages were taken. At the same time, we know many Palestinians are grieving in terms of what is happening in the war as

well. We know that both Muslims and Jews need to come together at this time and look at how we can rebuild. But what the Greens are trying to do with political stunts will not do that. Using Parliament for political stunts will not do that. What we need is sensible discussion. We need to work together to ensure we restore safety here in this wonderful state.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member can come back to the procedural motion.

David SOUTHWICK: At an event last night we had members of the Jewish community wanting to leave Melbourne because they do not feel safe. We have had events, which we saw outside Melbourne Town Hall, at which people were harassed because they were Jewish, and they do not feel safe.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield to come back to the procedural motion, please.

David SOUTHWICK: It is really, really important that we do not use the Parliament for political stunts. This motion that the Greens are trying to put is a political stunt. It is for political purposes – it is for none other than that. I note that the Greens have brought in members of the public, like they have continually done, for this political stunt. That is not what the Parliament should be used for. There are many, many opportunities to sit down and discuss things in an appropriate way but not by using Parliament as a political stunt. We have an agenda and we have a program which we should be working towards. The Greens have not spoken, might I say, about the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024, which is all about community safety locally. People need to feel safe in our state as well as internationally. We do not need the events of what is happening in the Middle East unfolding here on our streets in Melbourne, and that is what is happening at the moment, largely because we have the Greens trying to fuel things with political stunts. I think the time has passed for the Greens to try to use Parliament and use the streets of Melbourne, and city councils and other councils, for political stunts. We need to get people working together in our wonderful, multicultural state. We need to learn from one another, we need to love one another and we need to restore peace and integrity back into our state. That is not happening with the Greens. The ones that are absolutely trying to harm both Jews and Muslims are the Greens, by fuelling this debate. Parliament should not be used for this matter –

Gabrielle de Vietri: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I take offence to the statement that the Greens are trying to harm both Jews and Muslims.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is the point of order, member for Richmond?

Gabrielle de Vietri: I take offence.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Richmond. The member for Caulfield to continue on the procedural motion on the need for the adjournment.

David SOUTHWICK: There is no need for this adjournment, simply because what the Greens are trying to do is to politicise something that is really important when it comes to human life. Human life is really important. But there are ways to do that – not to spread lies and fear, as the Greens continue to do; not to fuel one group against another group; and not to instil hate, as the Greens continue to do. We are dealing with a piece of legislation in the Parliament which is all about community safety, but it seems like the Greens have forgotten about community safety and instead want to fuel hate and violence, because that is what they are doing. Every time they come into this Parliament and try to divide and instil fear and hate, all that does is harm those in Melbourne, people who love our state but are currently leaving our state because of the agenda and hatred that the Greens are trying to instil in this state.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (16:11): We are members of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Victoria, a state parliament. The Victorian government is a sub-sovereign jurisdiction, and that is why I also oppose the motion moved by the member for Richmond. The idea that this

Parliament would adjourn debate on a bill that is completely within the remit of this Parliament to talk about a conflict in the Middle East, no matter how horrific that conflict is, is something I do not support.

I would also contribute this: the member for Richmond has brought a different element to this Parliament that I have not seen in my decade in this place. It is, frankly, an unsavoury element. The member for Richmond is a protester; she is not a parliamentarian.

Tim Read: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do not think comments about the member for Richmond are relevant to whether or not debate should be adjourned.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will make the general statement that impugning members is unparliamentary, and I ask the member for Bentleigh to continue carefully.

Nick STAIKOS: Nothing we say in this house is going to impact the war in Gaza; therefore this is a stunt. It is a protest. I will just say this: grief is not a binary choice. A dead Muslim child or a dead Jewish child, to me, is a dead child. It is not a binary choice who we grieve for. As someone with no personal skin in the game as to what is happening overseas, I think it is absolutely horrific. The loss of life we have seen in that part of the world since 7 October has been absolutely horrific. But what is our role in this Parliament? Our role is to promote multiculturalism, to keep the peace, to keep tensions down. One of my duties as a parliamentary secretary is multicultural affairs. I am acutely aware of the efforts that our Victorian Multicultural Commission is going to as we speak to bring together the Jewish and Islamic communities and to keep tensions down.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the procedural motion.

Nick STAIKOS: I am also acutely aware of the measures that this government is taking. I was with our Minister for Multicultural Affairs when she announced \$3 million to combat both antisemitism and Islamophobia. That is the right thing to do. But stoking these tensions in this place – this is why I oppose adjourning debate on a bill that is about community safety.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Bentleigh to come back to the procedural motion. You had strayed.

Nick STAIKOS: I oppose adjourning debate on this bill because I see it as stoking tensions – absolutely stoking tensions. Our role is to keep tensions down. It is unacceptable to me that there are Australians here in our state who feel unsafe just because of who they are. That is unacceptable to me, and it should be unacceptable to every member of this house. But sadly, this is where we are at right now. Sadly, these are the times we are living in. While most members of this house are trying to keep those tensions down, I am absolutely offended that there are some in this house who are trying to stoke those tensions. Again, I reiterate, what is happening in Gaza is absolutely horrific. The loss of life we have seen since 7 October of both Jewish people and Islamic people has been absolutely horrific.

But do you know what, a week ago the Prime Minister released a statement on these matters, because this is a federal government matter as to Australia's position on these issues. This is a state Parliament; it is not for us to adjourn debate on a bill that is squarely within the remit of this Parliament just so that the Greens can pull a stunt. I oppose the motion.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:15): It concerns me that –

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Melbourne was clearly on her feet well ahead of the member for Brighton.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Proportionality in the chamber – and both members stood at about the same time. The member for Brighton has the call. You can seek leave to have the call following the end of the debate, I presume.

James NEWBURY: Firstly, the coalition will not be supporting this motion. As I have raised in this chamber a number of times, we will not be supporting this motion because what we are seeing sadly in this place is a set of tactics that are being used, like the motion before the house at the moment, that are an inappropriate use of this house. I am not suggesting that there are not circumstances where debate should be adjourned. There are circumstances where debate should be adjourned, but what we have seen over recent weeks, almost consecutive weeks, is a set of tactics that are seeking to use this house in an inappropriate way, and that is what this motion does. What this motion intends to do is to frankly light a fire under an issue. That is what the intention is.

Today the Greens had an opportunity to ask the Premier of this great state a question in question time – that is their right, and so it should be their right – and they did ask a question of the Premier. There are opportunities in this place to raise issues, and the Greens did that this very day. They have many opportunities to raise issues. In no way am I arguing that there should not be more opportunities for the non-government side of this place to speak on matters. There should be more opportunities, and it is one of the reasons why I proposed a second chamber of this very place, so that we could have debates on other matters. But this place is not a place that should be used to light fires under issues, and that is what this motion seeks to do.

What concerns me – and the coalition, as I said, will not be supporting this motion – is that the impact of what is happening in this place is having a profound effect outside this chamber. I would say to every member, as they consider how they will vote, to consider what the impact of voting yes would be outside this chamber. Every occasion over recent weeks – the repeated incidents of the Parliament being shut down, or in this case shut down or diverted – has had an impact outside this place. That is why this side of the house and, as I understand it, the government could not in good conscience support this motion. How can you support this motion? I would say to all members of this place: we need to look at the way these tactics are being used and whether or not that is an appropriate use of this place. We need to think through the impact that this is now having very closely, because we certainly would not want to make changes that impinge on rights of members to do things in this place as they should. But there is a difference between using this space appropriately and not, and I think we almost all in this place agree that what we have seen over recent weeks is of deep, deep concern. The Premier spoke to that matter. I have spoken to that matter. There is, I believe, in terms of the major parties a bipartisan concern over what is happening in this place. And on this very motion, which is another instance of that behaviour, we cannot let it continue. We cannot let an activism creep into this place which is dangerous and has an impact outside of here. So on the motion, I would say the coalition will not be supporting it. I think that as a Parliament we need to consider what has been happening recently and consider what options we may have, because we cannot allow people to be hurt, and that is what is happening.

Motions like this hurt people. It fuels fires that people in leadership and community leadership should know better than to do, so the coalition will be strongly opposing this motion today.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:20): I rise to oppose the motion to adjourn debate. I will keep it to a tight debate I think. There is of course the government business program, which the Greens are welcome to add to. They could have been here for that. Instead we have this influencer-style version of politics where we introduce motions to interrupt really important debate. I think what I would say is: this is a very complex issue. But like the member for Bentleigh, I am a member of the Victorian Parliament – not the federal Parliament, not the UN, not the Knesset – and I fail to see what difference this will make. I really think that we are going through a stage in this Parliament that is quite concerning as well. Right now you can look on your Instagram and you can see fires burning in my electorate.

Dylan Wight interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit! I can hear you from here. The member for Tarneit is warned.

Paul EDBROOKE: You can see fires burning in western Victoria. There are firefighters, police, SES and emergency workers that are going to have a bloody big night and a dangerous night, and they are going to be in that environment for a long time tomorrow as well. I think that is where the hearts and minds of people in this chamber need to be. That is where our thoughts need to be. When we actually support our communities, we do not end up making these motions that are very influencersesque. This house has run very well, and it is not many times I will find myself agreeing with the member for Brighton, but on this one I wholeheartedly do. Do not take that home with you. There is a wind change coming, from north-west to south-west, and that will make the right-hand flank of that fire, a very large fire in north-west Victoria, come to a head pretty soon. That is of huge concern to most people, I think, in this chamber. It affects a lot of people, a lot of Victorians, who we represent – who everyone in this chamber represents.

I am not by any chance trying to minimise what is happening overseas, but what I am saying is that people in the Victorian Parliament run by a policy of a government business program. Right now I think I am the next speaker on the bill, and I would like to speak on that bill and then I would like to go back to my electorate and make sure that the people keeping my electorate safe are safe themselves and are supported and feel supported. I know there are people in the north-west and there are people in Gippsland right now without power, and their MPs need to do the same. As far as I see this, I am not going to say it is a waste of time, but it is time that could be better spent on the government business program, and I oppose the motion to adjourn the debate.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (3): Gabrielle de Vietri, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

Noes (69): Juliana Addison, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Brad Rowswell, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Iwan Walters, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

Motion defeated.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:29): It is a pleasure to rise on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. We know that every day, in any weather and at any hour, our hardworking police officers are out there patrolling the front line, often putting themselves at risk to keep our community safe, and we thank them for that. We thank every Victoria Police member and their families for the service they provide to our state. I am proud that the Allan Labor government has a record of working with Victoria Police to ensure that they have the resources they need to keep on doing this important job.

Since coming to government we have made record investments of more than \$4.5 billion to deliver to Victorians the modern, world-class policing they deserve. As part of the 2022–23 budget we invested \$342 million to deliver 502 additional new police officers and 50 PSOs, building on the more than 3100 additional police already on our streets. That is more than 3600 additional police funded by our government since 2014. That is an absolute record. We have also invested in new equipment for our police, including the \$214 million taser rollout, which the minister spoke about earlier, to all frontline

police officers and PSOs to ensure that they have another nonlethal tool at their disposal to respond to potentially violent offenders.

We have also invested more than \$1 billion to deliver new and upgraded police stations across our state and our government will continue to invest in critical police infrastructure. As the parliamentary secretary for police at one stage, it was great to get out to some of the regional areas and open some of those police stations as well. Importantly, we are also investing in early intervention programs, including \$12.4 million in the most recent budget to continue and expand the important work of the Aboriginal youth cautioning program and embedded youth outreach program. In Frankston, that is going along great guns and working very well.

As far as the firearms control section of this bill goes, as a former chair of the firearms community round table I think under the current laws a firearm prohibition order must be served in person, which can be notoriously difficult, especially when a member of the public might be evading police actually giving them that FPO. It is true to say that there was nervousness around firearm prohibition orders with some members of the gun-owning community at first, but I think now they have got the confidence that this FPO legislation is squarely aimed at offenders. There have been plenty of examples of relatives of bikies et cetera that are the people I think everyone who is reasonable in this chamber would believe would have a reason to have an FPO served on them. As far as I know, among licensed owners with legitimate registered firearms there are not any examples of people that feel they have been targeted or hard done by.

What this legislation does is enable police to stop a person in public and direct them to remain there or accompany them to a police station for 2 hours for the purposes of serving that FPO, which is really important as part of our community safety program. Police will also be able to apply to a magistrate for a warrant to enter and search premises and serve a person with an FPO. It really goes to the context of who we are serving FPOs to. They are looking to be the types of characters that might not want an FPO served on them, the types of characters that might want to hide from police, so I think this is a great piece of legislation to enable police to actually keep our community even safer.

Where an individual in detention has declined a visit by a police officer, police will also be able to serve an FPO on that person by registered post. These changes are what police have told us they need to ensure this game-changing scheme that is the FPO scheme continues and police are provided with the powers they need to keep our communities safe.

I think it is fair to say that the Allan Labor government is proud to actually work with our police force and police command, not against them, to ensure our police actually have the tools they need to do the job of keeping Victorians safe. This is another example of us doing that in a legislative sense. As far as stakeholders go, we had some questions from the opposition about consultation. In the development of this bill, there was consultation with Victoria Police, IBAC, Victoria Legal Aid, the Commission for Children and Young People, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus policy and legislative change collaborative working group, the Magistrates Court, the Children's Court and the Victorian Firearms Consultative Committee. I am proud to say I did chair that committee. A finer bunch of people to work with you would not find, and they really represent the firearms industry and other firearms stakeholders around the place.

As far as machetes go in this amendment bill, it is an interesting argument that has been brought up by some of those opposite. And I do not want to labour the point, but Victoria Police have actually asked for these powers. What this bill does is insert in the definition of 'controlled weapon' that 'A machete is a type of knife.' This is a clarification, and it confirms the current legal position that a machete is a knife and therefore a controlled weapon. Up until this point there have been cases of people seeing machetes not as knives but as tools. We have heard plenty of examples of them being sold in markets et cetera. I think this part of the legislation enhances the community's appreciation that machetes may only be possessed and purchased by people who are over 18 and those who have a lawful excuse to be using them. I just want to reiterate that a controlled weapon cannot be sold to

anyone under 18. Anything that is a knife or categorised as a knife is a controlled weapon and cannot be sold to anyone under the age of 18.

Victoria Police, as I said, have identified that there are some market stallholders, wholesalers and members of the community who more broadly consider machetes as not a weapon but a tool. Therefore this clarifies that machetes are indeed weapons and you do not need to own one unless there is a reason to do so – and a lawful reason at that. And while it is true that machetes can be used as tools, I could not put it better than some other members have in saying I do not see too many cane fields around Frankston that require the use of machetes, nor Victoria, and I would disagree with anyone that thinks they have to drive around with a machete in their car or have anything like that on their person.

Police actually do not support making machetes prohibited weapons. I think it is pretty common sense. A prohibited weapon is something like a gun, for example, or a balisong knife, a butterfly knife or knuckle dusters – those sorts of things. Those sorts of things are prohibitive weapons. With a gun, for example, if you were to own a gun and become a licensed gun owner with registered firearms you would need to undergo a safety course, you would need to be seen as a fit and proper person, undergo the test and be given a licence. I do not think we want to go down the path where we give police and our departments the laborious task of making sure everyone has to apply for a machete, get a licence and do a safety course. I do not think that is what police want.

Then you can go to the other side of the coin. If we did that, then I believe it is pretty common sense that you would probably have people trying to buy kitchen knives, and there are some pretty big kitchen knives out there. Again, they cannot be sold to people under 18, but that is the next step down the track I think. So this is common sense, and it strikes a balance that indeed police have asked for and they support this legislation.

In clarifying that a machete is indeed a controlled weapon there can be no excuse for retailers or for people in markets to be selling these long agricultural-style blades and acting as though they do not know what they are doing, because that absolutely do. There is no excuse for anyone to be carrying a machete around town. As previous members have said, it is just not an excuse to say that you need it as some kind of tool or for some other use. It is obviously being used for or carried for a possible nefarious purpose. This bill goes a long way to ensuring that police have the powers they need, but it also makes sure that people in our community know that they will not get away with this anymore and there are significant fines. Just to conclude, I think there is some, I guess, confusion on the other side about this bill, but I certainly commend this bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (16:39): I also rise to talk on the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. Firstly, I would like to thank the member for Berwick for his lead today and for providing us with some inside thoughts on the bill and everyone who has spoken on this particular amendment bill in the chamber today. Obviously our side is a little bit different to the other side there. We are thinking that the part with the machetes does not go far enough, and I will touch on that shortly. But the purpose of the bill is (1) to amend the Firearms Act 1996 to further provide for the service of firearm prohibition orders, or FPOs, and any related and minor matters and (2) to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to clarify that a machete is a type of knife.

The member for Frankston just spoke before about how bringing machetes in as a type of knife is going to change the current way the bill is read. Where I am from, I have got a good mate down in Flynn, Peter Ayres. Pete is farmer and has been a farmer for a very long time down on his property in Bonnie Brae, and with the work that he does on his farm I do not think I have ever seen him use a machete for anything. If he is clearing some trees or anything like that, he is jumping on his backhoe and removing them that way, if they need to be done, or he is getting his beautiful Ryobi power tools out and using them. So for someone to have a machete, especially here in Victoria, and to be carrying it on their person, I think we all in the chamber realise it is not needed.

Even though we are moving an amendment to the bill to make carrying a machete as though you are carrying a knife, I do feel that – I get a little bit of feedback from the people down in Morwell. Of course, like everybody in the state of Victoria, we are all seeing our youth crime rate spike a little bit around the place. We are no different down in Morwell. Our youth crime rate has gone up markedly. So if we have stuff we are doing here in the chamber to amend this bill, why can't we take the extra step to make it that you cannot carry it on you when you are walking down the street? It is becoming a weapon of choice with our younger people, as members have spoken about before, with the advent of social media and people wanting to seem to outdo each other in the way that they are being very aggressive in committing crimes and engaging with other people. The social media stuff – you have only got to get onto Facebook or any other platforms and you will see just how prevalent it is. We can actually stop this by amending this bill with the member for Berwick's reasoned amendment. Why do we need to carry something around on our person? I do not think we really need to do it.

A controlled weapon, which is what the government's amendment will make it, is a weapon that can be possessed, carried and used for legitimate purposes but may pose a potential danger to the community. As I said before, I do not think anyone in the chamber here has probably carried a machete, unless they have seen one in a market and as they have walked past had a look. But in my time being a plumber I do not think I ever picked up a machete to use it to clear a workspace for myself. If we make it a prohibited weapon, prohibited weapons are items considered inappropriate for general possession and use without the Chief Commissioner of Police's approval or a Governor in Council exemption order. So if we are at the stage where we are going to make changes to the bill, why can't we take that extra step further before – hopefully not – there is a major incident on our streets where a machete is used to hurt someone or, in the worst case, to actually kill someone and we are back here talking about why we didn't take that extra step to protect our community?

It is stuff like that that we do need to consider. I understand listening to the government with their proposals of what they are trying to achieve. With the FPOs, it does expand the bill and gives police the power to serve a firearm prohibition order. We need that. The police have said they need that and the stakeholders have said they need that, so we have no issue at all with that part of the bill. But it is just that with our youth gangs now getting smarter and smarter – and they really do not care if they are carrying a concealed weapon or not – if we make it so that a machete is a prohibited weapon I think that is a great thing that we can do.

On Morwell crime figures, I was having a look before at the figures released by the Crime Statistics Agency Victoria in December, which show criminal incidents in the Latrobe local government area for the year to 30 September last year were up 13.6 compared with the previous year. In the town of Morwell, where my office is, criminal incidents spiked by a massive 25 per cent in 2023.

When I engage with residents when I am walking down the street or I am purposefully standing at the bus interchange or at the train stations around the place, the one particular thing that they all come back to is how they feel at times unsafe on our streets, because obviously we have some unsavoury people that are standing on the corners, but also just the way that our youth gangs are going around – they do not have one bit of respect for our police or any of our local law officers at all. Our police do an absolutely magnificent job down there. We engage all the time. Next week we have a community safety forum which we hold every three months with the police out of Moe, Morwell, Traralgon and Churchill, which are the police stations in my seat of Morwell. We also engage with the Latrobe City Council and other stakeholders. The one thing that we do get when we sit down and talk is a good grasp of just what the issues are around the valley, and one of the prevalent ones is the feeling of being unsafe on our streets. I actually talk with a lot of our older generation down there, the wonderful people that have now retired. They love to get a bus to go down the street to go to the shopping centres. They are getting off those buses and being confronted with unruly and unsavoury people that hang out there a lot of the time. I think everybody in this chamber would have come across that in the towns they live in. You do not have to walk too far to come across an incident.

I agree with those on both sides of the chamber about how well and how hard our police officers work in engaging not only with the community but also with youth. They do the best they can to make sure that everyone – the youth in general that they are trying to deal with and the people on our streets – feels safe. We do have some diversionary programs there for the youth to do that.

To get back to the point, if we are taking the machetes and making them harder to get, why don't we take the next step and make them illegal to have with you? Make it safe. Be succinct, straight up: 'Here you go – police.' You would not have to worry. If you walked up to someone and they were holding a concealed weapon or a machete on their body, they could not say, 'Well, I'm walking down the street to go and actually do some work around the corner.' They would be doing the wrong thing, and the police could deal with them.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (16:49): 'I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the youth of today, but certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was young we were taught to be respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful' – so said Hesiod in the 8th century BCE. From time immemorial people have been concerned about the youth of their day. That is a common feature throughout all time. In fact we heard it from the member for Morwell across from us just now. He was concerned about young people at bus stops and train stations, which I consider a form of public transport. He was kind enough to quote the crime statistics for his area, and he reported that crime is up within his area. I am so glad that the learned member for Point Cook beside me was able to quickly bring up his crime statistics for the area that he was quoting and note that crime in fact is below 2019 levels. Crime remains lower than before COVID in his LGA, which he referred to. We have a problem with perception versus reality, and we have to be careful that we do not contribute to the perception by going around and saying that crime is up when it is not.

However, there is a type of crime in his area that remains stubbornly high, and that is family violence. I hope that the member for Morwell, when at the bus stations and the train stations in his area, when walking around, will recognise that family violence offenders are not always able to be picked out and determined and that family violence is a scourge in all parts of our society. I hope that he will be able to champion the recommendations and the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Women know, women are told – I am sure every woman in this chamber at some stage has been told – that the most dangerous place in your house is the kitchen. Stay away from the kitchen if you are with a person who perpetrates violence, because that is where knives are. Of course knives are the subject of our discussion today. In the context in which we talk about it, we should recognise that women know all too well that knives are a weapon. When we classify them, we are not going to prohibit knives in family kitchens, but in fact they are the most dangerous thing for women in Victoria and across all of Australia.

I speak about the difference between reality and perception, and unfortunately those opposite today have tried to say that we do not back police to allow them to be able to do their job. But the reality is that this is a bill that was developed in response to a request from the police. We back police. In fact the firearm prohibitions order scheme was first introduced in 2018 by this government. That is how much we back the police. At the time that that original scheme was introduced in this place – I may have told you the other day – we heard concerns from those opposite. We heard from the member for Gippsland South that he was worried that police would use these powers against people that they had a gripe with. Fancy talking about our police misusing something which they have to help keep safety in our areas! Having a gripe – that is not backing police.

I can proudly say that this government certainly backs police. You only have to look at the budget papers to see that. Just fiscally we can say that it is \$4.5 billion over nine years. The graph shows an arrow that goes up and up. That investment has been in everything from technology and equipment for our police officers through to their ability to target high-harm crimes. It has involved recruitment of additional police officers and upgrading of police stations so that they can have more ability and more freedom to serve people.

Michael O'Brien interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: I would love to respond to the member for Malvern, because when I talk to members in my community they want to see police out on the beat. They want to see people out on the street patrolling and checking that everything is okay. That is why I was happy when I met with, for example, members of the Donnybrook community regarding local crime. They were happy to hear that police were away from the station and patrolling the area. In fact those things made people feel reassured, because crime does not occur in police stations, crime occurs out on the street. It is good to have police out where the crime occurs.

Michael O'Brien interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Malvern is getting dangerously close to reflecting on the Chair.

Lauren KATHAGE: That would be as though we would have highway patrol sitting at the police station. Nobody wants highway patrol at the police station. We want them out on the highways patrolling, so it makes absolute sense to me that the Chief Commissioner of Police in fact has made the decision. That is his duty to make operational decisions, and we back the chief commissioner to know what is best for his policing force and for the safety of our community. And I think safety of the community is what this bill is essentially about.

Certainly in recent times I have met with a couple of community groups who wished to speak about burglaries or local crime in their area and talk about their concerns and what they hoped to see. They encouraged me to speak with our local constabularies about that, which I certainly did. I was very happy to speak with members of the Mernda and Epping police stations, with their senior sergeants. In fact I believe the Minister for Police will be visiting us at the Mernda police station tomorrow, and so I will be happy to relay to the police at the station what people have relayed in this debate.

When I met with the police officers, who cover a very large area, what they said to me and what they asked me to tell community members was that the crime in your area remains low. 'The crime in your area remains low' is what they wanted people to know. They asked me to assist with the poor perception that was rising around crime, and that is why I speak about perception versus reality in my area, in my electorate that I represent. There are sensible things that people can do, such as truthfully report the crime statistics in their area. Do not come into the chamber and say that crime is up in your area when it is historically low. That is really unhelpful for feelings of comfort in the community, and it is unhelpful for the police, who are seeking to maintain an appropriate community attitude. Nobody wants feelings of vigilantism or anything of that nature.

In fact nobody wants to see people coming into contact with the criminal justice system, and that is why this government has invested so much in crime prevention, especially for our young people. That work and that funding for crime prevention – we can see that our investment and reform in youth justice coincides with a long-term decline in the rate of alleged offender incidents in Victoria for people aged 17 and under. Youth crime is reducing in Victoria per 100,000 head of population – perception and reality. It is important that we stick with what the reality is. The reality is that our government invests in our police, we back our police and we support young people to keep them away from crime.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (16:59): In the limited time I have to make a contribution – saving the best till last – can I say that I support the member for Berwick and the amendments. Can I say to those on the other side who spoke on this bill that they missed an opportunity today. They really did miss an opportunity. There is a chance to actually make Victoria safer, and you have chosen to sit on your hands and do nothing. You have just read the government notes rather than standing up for your communities and letting them see that you really do support them. Nearly every member has talked about violence in their electorate with knives and machetes, but still you read the government notes. You had a chance. You had an opportunity to do something about it today, and you did not.

The SPEAKER: Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The house is considering the Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024. The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Berwick has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after ‘That’ and replace them with the words which have been circulated. The question is:

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

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

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (22): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallance, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lily D’Ambrosio:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And James Newbury’s amendment:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government:

- (1) guarantees secure and reliable energy for every Victorian, noting the recent system collapse which led to 530,000 people without power;
- (2) commits to energy being affordable, noting the 25 per cent price increase over the last year;
- (3) details how Victoria will have adequate baseload power, noting the state government’s ban on gas;

- (4) sets out a plan to upgrade 57-year-old transmission infrastructure, noting that almost one in seven of Victoria's 13,000 electricity transmission towers is damaged and experts warned the government in 2020 of the risks in extreme weather events;
- (5) reveals to Victorians exactly how the new planning powers, and ministerial directions, will operate, and why the government is stripping communities from planning decisions;
- (6) explains what the impact will be on agricultural land, when analysis from the government's offshore wind policy directions paper of March 2020 shows that to meet net zero targets up to 70 per cent of Victoria's land will need to host wind and solar farms;
- (7) provides an update on how Victoria will reach the 2032 wind target, noting the collapse of the flagship project in Hastings; and
- (8) provides public transparency on climate measures through a website with live measures covering emissions, renewable energy, battery storage, and wind energy.'

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Brighton has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

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

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

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Maree Edwards, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (22): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

**Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill
2024**

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Jess Wilson's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government:

- (1) provides a preliminary or draft fee structure for the early learning centres (ELCs) scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026;
- (2) seeks written feedback from any childcare centre, kindergarten or preschool within a 15-kilometre radius of the proposed government ELC sites regarding the likely impact of a government ELC on their workforce capacity and enrolments, and provides their feedback to the house;
- (3) conducts an analysis on the childcare workforce implications of the new government ELC sites, including:
 - (a) establishing the workforce vacancy rates around the locations of the new sites; and
 - (b) providing the house with a comprehensive plan on how the government will ensure existing childcare centres and kindergartens are not disadvantaged in their ability to recruit and retain staff in their existing programs; and
- (4) provides an estimate of the budget impact of the operating costs for the government ELCs scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026.'

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Kew has moved a reasoned amendment to the motion. She has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

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

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

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (22): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallance, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Before I call the first member to speak on adjournment matters, I advise that I have been made aware of allegations of a breach of standing order 234. I advise the house of my intention to review the allegations in the break and reserve a ruling.

Kew Recreation Centre redevelopment

Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:13): (541) My adjournment is for the Premier. The action I am seeking is an urgent review of both VBA's and WorkSafe's investigations into the Kew Recreation Centre construction site so that investigations can be finalised and for any findings to be made public immediately. For context, the City of Boroondara commissioned builder ADCO Constructions to redevelop the Kew Recreation Centre. Doors closed to residents in 2020, and ADCO took control of the site. As the Premier may be aware, in October 2022 a section of the steel roof structure that had been erected onsite partially collapsed. Fortunately, no-one was hurt, and the collapse occurred after working hours. What has followed in the 18 months since that collapse is an absolute farce. WorkSafe commenced their investigation the day after the collapse, while the Victorian Building Authority started their work in December, but these two regulators have brought down a cone of silence around the site, leaving residents and ratepayers completely in the dark over a year later. We still have no idea what caused the collapse. We still have no idea if anyone will ever be held responsible for what could have been a catastrophic safety failure if the collapse had happened during working hours, and until recently we did not even know when we will have a functional recreation facility onsite. I understand that a building permit has finally been issued for works to resume onsite, and Boroondara council have this month been able to advise us of a revised build timetable.

So we now know that Boroondara residents and ratepayers will be waiting until the middle of 2026 for the new centre to be opened, keeping in mind that the original time frame for the build would have seen the new recreation centre up and running by now. Instead, all we have is a whole lot of concrete onsite. The Premier must step up and review the actions of the VBA and WorkSafe in relation to this site. Their investigations have been shrouded in secrecy, meaning we do not know exactly what actions they have taken. We also know it is possible they intend to never make their findings publicly available. These investigations are moving at an absolutely glacial pace while the site has spent months literally gathering dust. Victorian taxpayers deserve to know how these Victorian government regulators are discharging their responsibilities in relation to the Kew recreation site, and Boroondara ratepayers deserve to have confidence in these statutory authorities that are responsible for ensuring that the site is safe going forward. I ask how they can have that confidence when these agencies refuse to make public their work in relation to the Kew recreation site and there is no sense of time line for these investigations.

The Premier needs to urgently review the actions of both WorkSafe and the VBA in relation to the Kew recreation site, because whatever actions they have taken are clearly not delivering an acceptable outcome. My constituents are missing out on important recreational and community facilities that are desperately needed. A generation of children are missing out on the Kew rec pool, something that so many of us, including me, have such fond memories of. They deserve answers, not further delays and secrecy. It is time these investigations were finalised, the findings were made public and the Kew Recreation Centre be built immediately.

Country Fire Authority Rockbank brigade

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (17:16): (542) The adjournment I wish to raise is for the Minister for Emergency Services. The action I seek is for the minister to join me on a tour of the Rockbank Country Fire Authority and meet with members to discuss their current and future needs. This government is a strong supporter of the CFA and other emergency services, with investments

made in tankers, trucks, equipment and station upgrades. The Rockbank brigade of the CFA responds to calls for assistance across two of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia. These remarkable volunteers put their lives on the line to keep us and our communities safe. Not only do they respond to a range of hazards, but they also support our communities to be fire ready and do incredible work alongside our emergency service partners. Rockbank CFA has been very successful in recent years in recruiting more women. However, they face challenges in retaining these women, as the station lacks separate toilet and change facilities. The CFA across Victoria is a dedicated and skilled team of volunteers. However, as they are diversifying their volunteer base, the facilities are letting them down when it comes to retaining them. I invite the minister to join me on a tour of Rockbank CFA.

State Emergency Service Glen Eira unit

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (17:17): (543) My adjournment tonight is to the Premier, and the action that I seek is for the Premier to assist our SES in Glen Eira to finally access a new home. I just want to give my thanks to all emergency services workers, who have done a wonderful job keeping us safe. I know with the fires happening in our state at the moment that our hearts and thoughts are with all emergency services workers as they wrestle with getting the fires under control and protecting many of those that are experiencing them in the regions.

Our SES do a wonderful job, and I have spoken many times about the work that they do. Last week, as many of us have raised in this Parliament, with the issues of power, floods and storms, Glen Eira SES received 190 requests for assistance. It was one of the busiest times they have seen, and they certainly were well and truly extended in terms of what they were able to do. But I cannot believe that I am actually raising this, because at the time when they were trying to assist others they were dealing with their own floods and their own power issues in their facility itself. They lost power, and their facility was flooded. So before they could actually help others they had to try to help themselves to get the unit into some kind of state so they could get out to help others who desperately needed assistance.

I raised this back in November with the Minister for Emergency Services and asked for a new unit because the current unit is not fit for purpose. It is in Bentleigh; it is not fit for purpose. Although it is in Bentleigh, the Glen Eira unit services my area of Caulfield and surrounds. Again, after raising this issue in November we have not even had any kind of response at all from the government about this – not a response, not a letter, not a call, nothing. So I ask and I plead with the Premier to at least meet with the SES Glen Eira unit to look at options. I know I put the Katandra school in Ormond as an option. That is a vacant site now that would be perfect and fit for purpose for the unit to move straight into and get operational straightaway.

If that is not sufficient, let us find a facility that is. We cannot have a volunteer emergency service unit like the SES, which does a wonderful job, that cannot help others because they do not have a facility to even run out of properly and that is fit for purpose. It is appalling, and I think it was evident from the storms that have just gone. When you lose power and when you are flooded within your own facilities, how can you expect to help others when you do not have a facility fit for purpose?

Barwon Health

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:20): (544) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action that I seek from the minister is to visit the new early parenting centre in North Geelong. New mums and dads will soon have better access to early parenting support at this purpose-built facility. The new centre will have residential units, day-stay places, a kitchen, a dining area, playrooms and outdoor play areas. We can all appreciate the challenges that new parents face, from feeding challenges to nights without sleep, and this facility is designed to help families with children up to four years of age develop their relationships and achieve their parenting goals and to provide parents and carers with the advice and care that they need. The facilities, exteriors, kitchen and dining area and residential family units have been carefully considered to create a safe and serene environment where families can feel at home. Construction began in 2022, and I am thrilled to report that the centre is almost complete. This investment is just one more example of how the Allan Labor government is

prioritising the health of women and children, with investments like the new children's emergency department at University Hospital Geelong and the new \$500 million Barwon women's and children's hospital. I am very proud that this is being built in the Lara electorate to ensure services are accessible for those in the communities who need them most, and I am sure that the early parenting centre will be well used by Lara families and in fact by families right across the Geelong region. I look forward to hosting the minister for a tour of this wonderful new facility.

Family violence

David HODGETT (Croydon) (17:22): (545) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with my constituent Karen Hodgskiss. Her lived experience would offer a valuable perspective, shedding light on implications she has come across within the new family violence system. I was made aware that Ms Hodgskiss's journey within the family violence system commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic. She has been navigating the system ever since. Over this time she informed me she has experienced unjust incidents where she felt the policy settings within the various systems were working against one another to the detriment of vulnerable community members such as her. She wishes to discuss the shortcomings she has faced between the intersections across the family violence system, family law courts, child protection, police and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, noting these shortcomings have led Ms Hodgskiss to experience further trauma. Ms Hodgskiss is a passionate advocate wanting to drive reform for an improved family violence system. She believes her situation is not unique to her and that others are likely facing similar injustices. Her lived experience would offer a valuable perspective, shedding light on implications she has come across within the new family violence system, so again I ask the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence to meet with my constituent Karen Hodgskiss.

Preston electorate public transport

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (17:23): (546) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to the Tyler Street and Plenty Road tram stop. As the minister will know, the tram stop is quite a famous one. It was the terminus of the original cable car route that ran from the city to Preston in the 1920s, and it was the terminus of the old 88 East Preston route for many years. As you might expect of a stop that was a longstanding terminus, there has been a lot of development around it over the years. There are a lot of shops where people would get their groceries when they got off the cable car or the tram. There is Preston Primary, St Mary's church and a lot of our earlier housing, and in fact it remains what council call a neighbourhood activity centre today. In fact council have marked it as an area for more activity and densification. Unfortunately the history of the tram stop hit a bit of a bump in 2016 when the new E-class trams were introduced onto the 86 route. The E-class trams are of course safer, more accessible and more advanced than the B-class trams they replaced. But they are also 10 metres longer, and essentially they did not fit at the northbound Tyler Street stop. They would have stuck out into traffic, and there would have been issues with driver visibility and passenger safety.

One possible solution would have been to redesign the intersection, but those in charge at the time decided to adopt a different solution, which was just to cancel the northbound 52 stop. They removed the signs and reprogrammed the trams, and they now just roll straight past those shops, which is a large set of shops on Plenty Road. They do go past some connecting stops for buses, and they do go past a lot of houses. We have a 700-metre gap now, which is a larger gap than you would see anywhere going back to the city, and the confusing situation whereby trams do stop on their way south. So the stop still technically exists, but anyone who tries to get off on their way north finds that they cannot.

As I said, these decisions were made a long time ago, and there would be considerable work to do across portfolios to fully understand them and to understand any potential remedies. But we are just hoping that the minister can come out to have a chat about a transport plan for the area more broadly. It is an area with a lot of new businesses, which is great. It is an area with new families. There is a lot

of enthusiasm in the area for active and public transport, and we are hoping to have a chat with her about how we can support that enthusiasm and how we can add to this Labor government's already very strong record on public transport and active transport in Preston and Reservoir.

Tobacco licensing scheme

Tim READ (Brunswick) (17:26): (547) My adjournment is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to finally roll out a Victorian licensing scheme for the sale of tobacco products, including nicotine for e-cigarettes, or vapes. In August 2021 I addressed an adjournment to the then Minister for Health asking the Victorian government to introduce a licensing scheme for tobacco retailers. In response I was informed that the commissioner for better regulation was at the time conducting a review into Victoria's approach to tobacco regulation. The 2½ years since have seen unprecedented levels of tobacco-related gang violence and arson attacks, illegal tobacco being sold under the counter and the rapid increase in nicotine vaping, particularly among children.

Incredibly, while this has been going on the Victorian Labor government has sat on the finalised Better Regulation Victoria report for almost 21 months now despite the report unambiguously recommending that the Victorian government introduce a licensing scheme for tobacco products and e-cigarettes, including wholesalers and retailers. Given the escalation in harmful public health and safety outcomes relating to tobacco sales over the last two years, it is unacceptable for the current government to blame its own disorganisation and machinery of government changes for its failure to act on the issue. It is much easier to regulate tobacco if we know where they are and who they all are. Right now Victoria is the only state where your cafe or your hairdresser could start selling cigarettes. Embarrassingly, Victoria is the only jurisdiction in Australia without a tobacco licensing scheme. It is beyond time for the Labor government to get on with the job of licensing tobacco and e-cigarette sellers.

Coburg North Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:27): (548) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Coburg North Primary School to meet with the local school community and hear firsthand about their vision to support learning and wellbeing outcomes for local students over coming years.

Coburg North Primary is situated along O'Hea Street, nestled between Bishop Street and Jersey Street and backing onto the magnificent Harmony Park. Originally part of Pascoe Vale Primary School for its first five years, Coburg North's buildings were officially opened on 20 April 1937 by the Assistant Minister of Public Instruction John R Harris, with the school's first head teacher being Henry Lanyon. In 1942 Coburg North officially became its own primary school, known as the Coburg North State School, with the first head teacher being Ruby Smith. When the school first opened it had very few buildings, with the original buildings including the cream brick building, two toilet blocks and two shelter sheds. It also had a boiler room run by coal, with the school connected to electricity in 1939. In 1975 the school underwent major renovations, which included a new library, language room, art and music room and amphitheatre. One of the most notable milestone events in the school's history was in 2005, when the then Prince of Wales, Prince Charles, now His Majesty the King, visited Coburg North Primary School as part of a royal tour. Long live the republic.

Today Coburg North proudly continues to foster a thriving school community of curious, creative and engaged learners and a student cohort that is extremely civic minded and globally aware. As a proud product of the local primary school system myself, having gone to Coburg West over the other side of Bell Street, I am very keen to support Coburg North and all the primary schools as best I can. That is why I was pleased to visit Coburg North last year on 24 March to celebrate Ride2School Day but also to see the school's completed \$6.9 million facilities, which were made possible by the Victorian Labor government: a new science, technology, engineering and maths STEAM hub as well as a new multipurpose space, inclusive outdoor spaces, quiet spaces, sensory exploration, a pirate ship area, a kitchen garden and an outdoor classroom pergola.

I was pleased to have visited again on 5 September to hear presentations from students about the government's need to take real action on climate change. I commend the students for having done great homework, including Bernie, Sonny, Dante, Vivienne, Eva, Maya, Clea, Olive, Lottie, Georgia and Louise, for their amazing presentation. The principal Monika Gruss does an amazing job, especially with how she has leveraged the state government's mental health resources by employing a full-time mental health coordinator to oversee the school's wellbeing and inclusion programs and adoption of the resilience project. I acknowledge this year's school captains Clea Sutton-Heath, Louise Hickson, Willa Cath and Ashling Ryan, as well as the teacher support staff and many others.

However, with demand for school facilities continuing to grow, with numbers growing from 114 students in 2010 all the way up to 545 students in 2024, opportunities exist for ongoing investment at the school, including the school's proposal to upgrade the school oval to provide for resurfacing, irrigation and drainage, which will play a major role in improving oval's resilience to cater for increased demand and varying weather patterns throughout the year. I would welcome the minister visiting. They will give him a warm reception, just like they did to His Majesty the King.

Flood recovery initiatives

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (17:31): (549) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place, and it concerns the rural flood recovery grants. I would ask the minister for an extension of time for those that have not been able to acquit their grants in the time that was allocated. I have got a number of constituents who have raised concerns. One of those constituents, from near Kerang, received the first \$25,000 of their \$75,000 grant, but they are having trouble getting contractors to do the work. They need heavy machinery, they need excavators and at the moment they just cannot get them in to do that work. They have been told that if they do not have it done by the time of the offer expiring, they will not be able to get the additional \$50,000. What I would be asking the minister to do is to please have an extension of time granted for those that for valid reasons have not been able to acquit the full expenditure of those grants in the time that was allocated. There is a similar case for the pharmacist in Rochester. Again, he has not had his shop refurbished since the floods. He is trading and he is providing a vital service to the town, but between the grant and his insurance policy there are still disputes about what work will be done. He runs the risk of missing out on his grant if the time expires again, so I would ask the minister for an extension of time for those who have a valid reason not to have acquitted their grants in the time that has been allocated.

Rental accommodation

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (17:32): (550) My short adjournment matter that I am raising for the Minister for Consumer Affairs concerns renter supports, as announced in the housing statement. The action I seek is that the minister provide an update on how this support will benefit my constituents in Narre Warren South. I am really glad to hear that our government has announced an injection of \$2 million as part of the housing statement to help take pressure off renters. The funding is on top of the government's \$25 million every year to assist at-risk renters to stay in private rental accommodation. It really is important to increase access for renters to secure housing and to ensure that there are fair negotiations that involve all parties and renters rights. On that basis I would look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:33): In response to the request from the member for Lara, I would be absolutely delighted to join her in visiting the North Geelong early parenting centre. Early parenting centres are going to change so many lives. I know that from the centres I have had the opportunity to visit so far. This is an investment in families in this state that we will all reap the benefits of for decades to come. The early parenting centres that I have already had the opportunity to visit have been extremely welcoming places. They treat all families with dignity and respect and

help parents to be the parents that they want to be by making sure they are providing guidance and support. People think of them perhaps like sleep schools, but they deliver so much more, and the member for Lara has so clearly articulated that. I cannot wait to go and visit with her.

Other matters were raised tonight. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that she sought is that the minister join her on a visit to Rockbank CFA. I am sure the minister would be delighted to do that. The member for Kew, who I note is no longer in the chamber, raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action that she sought is that the Premier seek information from the Victorian Building Authority and WorkSafe Victoria in relation to the Kew Recreation Centre site. The member expressed her displeasure at the way in which the development of that site is progressing and the role that both the VBA and WorkSafe are playing in that. The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action he sought – and I note he has gone home as well – was that the Premier assist the SES in Glen Eira. He made the case that the Glen Eira unit needs new accommodation.

The member for Croydon raised a matter for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and I note the member is in the chamber. The action that he seeks is that the minister meet with one of his constituents, Ms Karen Hodgskiss, to hear firsthand her experiences of the family violence system. The member for Preston raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action the member sought was that the minister visit the historic northbound Tyler Street tram stop, which unfortunately is no longer able to function as a tram stop, even whilst it is in the middle of an activity centre. I think the member for Preston has some grand plans for that tram stop, and I am sure he looks forward to the minister visiting with him.

The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that the member has sought is in relation to the establishment of a licensing scheme for cigarettes and vapes. I note, however, the recent actions of the Albanese Labor government and that the health minister Mark Butler, in cooperation with all of the states, is working to ensure that vapes are no longer able to be imported or made available to anyone other than via prescription and through a pharmacy.

The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education and, in his inimitable style, has requested that the Minister for Education join him on a tour of Coburg North Primary School, one I know that the Minister for Education will look forward to. The member for Murray Plains has raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that he seeks is that his constituents receive some assistance with receiving the bulk of their flood recovery grants and that there be some consideration of an extension of time for the delivery of those grants. The member for Narre Warren South has also raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that he is seeking is an update on how the additional funds of \$2 million that have been made available to support renters will benefit renters in his electorate.

I will ensure that they are all referred to the relevant ministers.

The SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:38 pm.