



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 2 May 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

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'Keefe, 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 ⁷	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, 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 ^{5,6}	Prahran	Ind	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 ⁸	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 Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁸ 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

CONTENTS

JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT	
Senate vacancy.....	1425
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Orders of the day	1425
PETITIONS	
Blue Rock Lake	1425
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	1425
JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT	
Senate vacancy.....	1426
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Werribee electorate infrastructure projects	1426
Tourist visas	1426
Susan Walter	1427
Grace Larson	1427
Poowong.....	1427
Country Fire Authority Korumburra brigade	1427
Mirboo North Netball Football Club	1427
Anzac Day	1428
Anzac Day	1428
Essendon electorate schools	1428
Essendon electorate housing.....	1429
Live music venues	1429
Dandenong Primary School.....	1429
Giant Steps	1430
Anzac Day	1430
Jagajaga Community Volunteer Awards	1430
Mount Arapiles rock climbing	1430
Western Highway duplication.....	1431
Ammar Mahmoud	1431
Anzac Day	1431
Timber industry	1431
Balcombe Grammar School	1432
Anzac Day	1432
Anzac Day	1432
Pentridge opera	1433
Pascoe Vale electorate schools.....	1433
John Mildren	1433
Anzac Day	1433
Ballarat City Council.....	1434
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Standing and sessional orders.....	1434
DOCUMENTS	
University of Divinity	1454
Report 2023	1454
MOTIONS	
Apology for past care leavers	1454
BILLS	
Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024.....	1457
Second reading.....	1457
MEMBERS	
Minister for Police	1470
Absence	1470
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Health funding	1471
Ministers statements: youth mental health	1472
Housing.....	1473
Ministers statements: housing	1474
Budget 2024–25.....	1475
Ministers statements: rental reform	1476
Medically supervised injecting facilities	1476

CONTENTS

Ministers statements: housing	1477
Government performance	1478
Ministers statements: housing	1479
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Eildon electorate	1480
Kororoit electorate	1480
Mildura electorate	1480
Pascoe Vale electorate	1480
Berwick electorate	1481
Narre Warren South electorate	1481
Rowville electorate	1481
Bellarine electorate	1482
Shepparton electorate	1482
Sunbury electorate	1482
BILLS	
Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024	1482
Second reading	1482
National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024	1495
Second reading	1495
Third reading	1503
Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024	1503
Second reading	1503
Third reading	1504
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Unparliamentary language	1504
ADJOURNMENT	
Patient transport	1504
Footscray community services	1505
Budget 2024–25	1505
Bentleigh Secondary College	1506
Warrandyte Mechanics Institute and Arts Association	1506
Springvale Park Special Developmental School	1507
Short-stay accommodation	1507
Christies Road, Ravenhall	1507
Swan Hill Community Issues Group	1508
Family violence	1508
Responses	1509

Thursday 2 May 2024

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

Joint sitting of Parliament

Senate vacancy

The SPEAKER (09:33): I advise that the house met yesterday with the Legislative Council to fill the Senate vacancy following the resignation of Senator Janet Rice and that Stephanie Hodgins-May was duly chosen.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, orders of the day 3 to 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions

Blue Rock Lake

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 191 signatures:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the House the decision by Southern Rural Water (SRW) to undertake significant reforestation planting along the south western area of Blue Rock Lake.

Residents are concerned the reforestation will create significant bushfire risk for the town and result in the loss of access to these leased allotments for land owners who currently rely on them for their livelihoods.

Willow Grove is already surrounded by forest, and these open areas have provided potential safe haven and direct access to Blue Rock Lake should a significant bushfire occur.

Reforestation will mean residents and surrounding land owners will be unable to manage these properties, and put at risk the lives of locals should a catastrophic event occur.

This decision to reforest these parcels has been taken with limited consultation and SRW has not provided any significant detail about how this decision will impact the safety of the town, or BAL ratings of properties into the future.

This could have a significant impact on Bushfire Management Overlays and result in increases in insurance premiums for locals.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria review this action being taken and keep these allotments as leased open areas, maintained by local farmers with grazing stock.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 – Review of Victoria’s Reportable Conduct Scheme under s 16ZN

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 27, 28

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Meat Industry Act 1993 – PrimeSafe Meat Industry Licensing and Fees Determination 2024

Seafood Safety Act 2003 – PrimeSafe Seafood Safety Licensing and Fees Determination 2024.

*Joint sitting of Parliament***Senate vacancy**

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received a message from the Legislative Council:

The Legislative Council informs the Legislative Assembly that they have agreed to the following resolution – That this House meets with the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of sitting and voting together to choose a person to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the resignation of Senator Janet Rice, and as proposed by the Assembly, the place and time of such meeting be the Legislative Assembly Chamber on Wednesday, 1 May 2024 at 6.00 pm.

It was a pleasure to have them with us last evening.

*Members statements***Werribee electorate infrastructure projects**

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (09:36): I rise to update the house on the recent allocations from the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund, known as GAIC, to the great Werribee community. An allocation will assist Wyndham council with the completion of the Ison Road project. Werribee locals know that this is a critical and necessary road link that will connect to the Ison Road rail overpass bridge that is currently under construction. The Ison Road connection will provide direct access to the Princes Freeway from the developing area of Mambourin, Manor Lakes and Wyndham Vale and ease traffic gridlock through the Werribee CBD. It is essential to get it done, and this government is committed to working in cooperation with our Commonwealth colleagues and local government to do exactly that.

I am also excited that this latest allocation includes funding for not only road infrastructure but new bus connections to Wyndham Vale train station from the Hartley estate and Cornerstone estate communities. This is an important service for a growing community. Just as exciting is the acquisition of land for the proposed government secondary school in Wollahra along with funding for a new Ambulance Victoria branch and SES facility in Wyndham Vale. So I think it is fair to say that the Allan Labor government is continuing to deliver for the west. People want to live close to transport, schools and essential services, and this investment will deliver the kind of infrastructure that is in fact needed.

Tourist visas

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:38:): Last night I raised a very important matter on the adjournment debate, and it has got to do with the Albanese government's frankly racist policy of knocking out Indians trying to visit their family here in Australia. I raised a number of examples where Indian health workers living in the UK who have visited other countries around the world were simply trying to come to Australia on a tourist visa to visit their family being sponsored here in Australia. Another example was of people in their sixties, government workers with good jobs, with property, with a life back in Delhi, who have been to the United States, Canada and Great Britain but cannot get a tourist visa to come to Australia because the federal government have now instituted a discriminatory policy against Indians, particularly those wanting to come to visit their family in Australia.

What is most concerning is that the former Minister for Multicultural Affairs the member for Bundoora tried to knock out my statement to try and get the state government to advocate for Victoria's Indian community. Why would someone do that? Why would the state Labor government support a racist policy against Indians in Australia? Why are the Labor Party and the left in this country institutionally racist? Why is the left in this country racist? Why do they hate Indian communities in this state? Why do they hate the Indian community? Why do these left-wingers in the inner city, driving Renaults, the worst – (*Time expired*)

Susan Walter

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:39): I rise to acknowledge Dr Susan Walter, a remarkable person from my community. As president of the Malmsbury Historical Society, Susan is an advocate for conserving and promoting our local history. Susan recently completed her PhD thesis in history on Malmsbury bluestone. Thanks to Susan's advocacy, and in an Australian first, Malmsbury bluestone is now officially recognised as a global heritage stone resource. I was honoured to meet Susan recently to learn about the history of the local bluestone, which was used in the construction of the Malmsbury viaduct and Melbourne's St Paul's and St Patrick's cathedrals. Thank you, Susan, and Malmsbury Historical Society, for all of your efforts.

Grace Larson

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:40): Congratulations to Grace Larson for her remarkable achievement in winning the Victorian AgriFutures Rural Woman of the Year award. Grace's dedication to improving the lives of families in rural and disadvantaged communities is second to none, leading the Kyneton local to co-found the Sisterhood Project alongside her sister Skye in 2022. With over 17 years of experience as a paediatric nurse, Grace understands the importance of empowering parents with skills in illness recognition and basic first aid. Sadly, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and rural and remote areas are more likely to die from preventable accidents, injuries and illness. The Sisterhood Project is working tirelessly to change these statistics through free infant – (*Time expired*)

Poowong

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:41): A big happy birthday to Poowong, which celebrated 150 years since its founding recently. Poowong is a beautiful, community-centred town in the rolling green hills of south-west Gippsland. Originally cut from the giant forests of the Strzelecki Ranges, it is now a centre for beef and dairy production, with a large export abattoir and more community facilities per capita than most small towns around the country. Poowong has a great community spirit and has always been willing to get in and help itself without waiting for governments or outsiders to step in. It has also been willing to take the mickey out of its name, most famously hosting the world premiere of the toilet humour Australian movie classic *Kenny*. It was a pleasure to join several hundred locals in the Poowong hall to celebrate the town's birthday.

Country Fire Authority Korumburra brigade

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:42): The very next day saw the Korumburra CFA celebrating 125 years since its formation. There were some excellent historical displays highlighting the many fires and emergencies the brigade has attended. Special guests and some words of wisdom from brigade life members made for a memorable day. The Korumburra fire brigade, though, is still waiting for the best birthday present it could hope for: funding from the state government for a new fire station. Along with Foster and Mirboo North, it has long been at the top of the infrastructure needs for district 9, but sadly these crucial volunteer-run facilities have been overlooked time and time again by the Labor government. It is time they got their fair share.

Mirboo North Netball Football Club

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:42): Speaking of Mirboo North, I was humbled and honoured to be made the number one ticketholder of the Mirboo North Football Netball Club for 2024. It has been a tough start to the year after the 13 February storm cell that smashed the town, and it has been a privilege to work with this wonderful community to help with the clean-up and rebuilding.

Anzac Day

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:42): I rise to speak about the many Anzac Day commemoration events I attended recently in my electorate of Mill Park. I am honoured to have attended the Turkish sub-branch of the Victorian RSL's 109th anniversary of Anzac Day traditional dinner alongside special guests Mehmet Ali Cevheri, an MP from the Parliament of Türkiye, and consul general Doğan Ferhat Işık. This annual event remembers the special, enduring friendship between Türkiye and Australia and the tragic loss of lives at the battle of Gallipoli. Many other Labor members of Parliament attended that event, and it was fantastic. I want to thank the branch president Ramazan Altintas and vice-president Sucettin Unal for the work they do in the Turkish community.

On Anzac Day I attended the Epping RSL's dawn service and laid a wreath on behalf of the Mill Park electorate. The service was very moving, and I want to thank Epping RSL president Kevin Ind and vice-president Mike Reid, as well as the rest of the Epping RSL community, for their hard work organising this service, which is always well attended and inclusive.

The following day I attended Mill Park Secondary College's Anzac Day assembly, where school leaders laid a wreath beneath the school's flagpoles to honour and remember the ongoing legacy of the Anzacs. It was wonderful to hear from Zachary Melvaine, who was one of 12 winners of last year's Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize and who spoke about what Anzac Day meant to him. School principal Tim Natoli gave a speech about the importance of learning from the past and the importance of upholding peace. Thanks to school leaders Frensi, Honey, Zachary, Mily and Ethan for running the assembly, and to Tim Natoli and his team for the amazing work they do every day for our young Victorians.

Anzac Day

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:44): I too rise today to put on the record the wonderful contributions made right across the electorate of Polwarth on Anzac Day. Anzac Day kicked off early on the Wednesday in Colac with the combined secondary school and primary school ceremony at the cenotaph in Memorial Square, Colac. It was fantastic to see a great roll-up. It then continued in every town and hamlet right across Polwarth. It was a real highlight this year to see the dawn service at Point Danger in Torquay reinvigorated, with estimates of up to nearly 10,000 people.

I also make note very much of the fact there were contributions in many of the towns this year from newer returned service men and women who stepped up to the role to help participate in this longstanding tradition that occurs on Anzac Day every year. I make particular note of Darcy Dunstan, a former SAS soldier, who did a fantastic job addressing the Torquay crowd when he brought home to the crowd and all those assembled the parallels between his life and that of his great-grandfather, who was in World War I.

These commemorative services right across Polwarth are an important contribution every year and also a fantastic acknowledgement of the past services of so many thousands of people right across the Polwarth region. I look forward to it again next year.

Essendon electorate schools

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:45): Essendon North Primary School is a fantastic local school led by Kate Barletta, who is an outstanding principal. I was delighted to be at Essendon North Primary School recently where Strathmore Men's Shed have donated a brand new playground and equipment for the students. It was a really fantastic school assembly. The kids were rapt and thrilled. It was just wonderful to see the sheddies make such a fantastic contribution to such a great local school.

I was delighted to officiate at the opening of the new wing at Ascot Vale West Primary School. It was wonderful to see principal Olivia Atanasovska, who has recently started there at the school. The new wing is just fabulous, and it aligned with the 100th anniversary of this great school.

I was delighted to open the new playground at Moonee Ponds West Primary School, the Big Adventure. It was great to see the kids out there super excited about the new playground. This is part of a broader \$7 million investment into Moonee Ponds West Primary School.

Essendon electorate housing

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:46): I am really pleased that as a local member of Parliament I have been able to push so hard to get more community housing within the electorate of Essendon. I was delighted to join the Minister for Housing recently when we opened brand new housing – housing which was opposed by the Greens political party, housing which has always been opposed by the Greens political party because unless it is their way it is the highway. It is not good enough. Public housing tenants deserve modern, decent, energy-efficient 21st-century accommodation. That is exactly what they are getting delivered under the Allan Labor government.

Live music venues

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:47): I do not want to put anyone to sleep, but we need to talk about insurance. Live music venues are under threat. Ruthless insurance companies have hiked up their costs and venues are shutting under the strain. Whole Lotta Love in Brunswick had to close its doors after its insurance went from \$3000 to \$30,000 a year. The Bendi, Bar Oussou and Ferdurdurke have all called last drinks. These venues are not just businesses, they are the lifeblood of our communities, they are the incubators of our culture and they are the places where emerging musicians create the music of tomorrow. AC/DC, Paul Kelly and Spiderbait all cut their teeth in small Melbourne venues. Cash Savage, Courtney Barnett and King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard all followed. There will be no next generation of musicians if the state government does not step in now.

In just a few weeks 2500 Victorians have called on the state government to step in and provide affordable insurance through the public insurer. It is not sexy like a cash grant, but it is significant and it does not cost much. The state government could do this next week in the state budget. The public insurer stepped in during COVID to save venues, and they can do it again. All it takes is a letter from the Assistant Treasurer. Please step in and save live music before more venues shut their doors.

Dandenong Primary School

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (09:49): It is with great pleasure that I rise to congratulate Dandenong Primary School on a truly terrific milestone: 150 years of fostering the educational achievement of kids in Dandenong. Dandenong Primary first opened its doors in 1874 and has been a constant as the electorate has evolved from a rural town to a thriving metropolitan hub. In that time we have also become Australia's most culturally diverse community, with over 158 different nationalities, over 100 different faith groups and more than 200 different languages spoken. These days the school very much reflects the diversity of the community that it serves so well.

Schools do not thrive for 150 years without exceptional staff, so I want to use this opportunity to say thank you to all the teachers and support staff who make Dandenong Primary School the place that it is but particularly to principal Daniel Riley, who tirelessly advocates not only for his school but for the families and community that make up that school community. It is worth mentioning that since its inception Dandenong Primary has produced some pretty significant alumni, among them Prime Minister John McEwen, journalist Joe Hildebrand and arguably perhaps most notably the member for Bayswater in this place Jackson Taylor – an alumnus that they are very, very proud of at Dandenong Primary School. He is certainly doing them very proud in his role in this place. In all seriousness

though, congratulations to the school community on 150 years. I am looking forward to being there for the celebrations on Saturday.

Giant Steps

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:50): On the weekend I attended Giant Steps' – a specialist school for children with autism in my electorate – Australia 108 Stair Challenge. This event is the nation's biggest stair climb, with hundreds of participants scaling 1700 'giant' steps to the top of Australia's tallest building to raise funds for this wonderful school. Congratulations to the school on such a successful fundraiser. It is always an absolute delight to support this terrific event with the dedicated team at Giant Steps, gorgeous students and parents like Alona and Keren and Stair Climbing Australia members. And a special shout-out goes to the legends at North Balwyn's Activate Allied Health, who continue to support Giant Steps.

Anzac Day

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:51): Kew RSL's Anzac Day Dawn service saw a huge crowd of local community members come together to pay respects for our fallen, current and former service men and women. Congratulations to Deb and the RSL committee for organising such a fitting tribute. It was wonderful to have so many local schools and young people attend the service and lay a wreath. This included the 1st Deepdene Scout group, Balwyn High, North Balwyn Primary, Camberwell Girls Grammar, Genezzano, Greythorn Primary, Kew High, Kew Primary, MLC, Preshil, Ruyton, Sacred Heart Primary, St Anne's Primary and Trinity Grammar.

I was also honoured to speak at Kew High's Anzac Day commemorative service. Congratulations to Jade and Hunter, the school captains, and school leaders on leading this very special service for all the students and staff. The importance of commemorating Anzac Day is well understood by our younger generations, and I commend them on their commitment to this important cause.

Jagajaga Community Volunteer Awards

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:52): It was my pleasure recently to attend the 2024 Jagajaga Community Volunteer Awards hosted by my hardworking federal colleague the member for Jagajaga Kate Thwaites MP. It was a true honour to recognise so many people who have worked so hard to make their local communities better places in which to live – people like Chris Hall, who has actively volunteered for countless groups in the Greensborough area over the years, including sporting clubs, schools, the local war memorial park and All Saints Anglican Church. Also recognised was Steve Hart for his years of work as secretary of Neighbourhood Watch in the Watsonia North and Greensborough areas and other amazing community volunteers like Rod Ferris and Meri Ivanovska, who have done so much to support the Rotary Club of Bundoora by running so many events over the years and supporting the club's operations, and also Bill Price from the Bundoora Football Club.

I would also like to take some time to recognise Kerryn and Stephen Longmuir. Over the last 39 years Kerryn and Stephen have provided care and love for more than 400 children as foster carers, influencing, loving and nurturing so many lives. In recognition of her work Kerryn was one of four finalists for the Victorian Australian of the Year 2024, specifically in the Local Hero of the Year category. I would like to thank every single one of the award recipients for all their contributions to my local community.

Mount Arapiles rock climbing

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:53): I raise a matter for the Premier, and I call her on her urgent intervention to immediately unlock rock climbing at Mount Arapiles where there are no areas of cultural heritage significance. We know that the rock climbing at Mount Arapiles was shut down about 4½ years ago. Since that time there have been a number of archaeological surveys and cultural heritage

surveys done at that site. We were told 3½ years ago that that would be completed within 12 months. We still have not had a result and an outcome.

For the Natimuk community and for the climbing community Mount Arapiles is very, very important. It brings in about \$12 million a year to Horsham and the Natimuk area. It supports important small businesses in the Natimuk community. Also so many people from around the world have chosen Natimuk to be their homes so they could access Mount Arapiles.

Climbers are not cultural bandits. They have actually put in an enormous amount of work to protect areas where there is cultural heritage, like rock art on the walls, and also where they know there have been scar trees, but by locking them out not only are they putting the community at risk but we have no protection for areas of cultural significance. I urge the Premier to urgently intervene and to act to reopen sites which have been assessed as not having areas of significant cultural heritage and also to make sure we can bring back rock climbing as soon as we possibly can.

Western Highway duplication

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:54): Again I urge the government to fund duplication of the Western Highway and to fix that highway to make it safe for our road users.

Ammar Mahmoud

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:54): I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ammar Mahmoud on his recent appointment to the Victorian Youth Congress. The Victorian Youth Congress is an advisory group of young people aged between 12 and 25 who work with the Victorian government to identify and advocate for issues that matter to them. Ammar attends Elevation Secondary College in my electorate and has been an active member of my Kalkallo Youth Advisory Council since the beginning of last year, where he has had the opportunity to talk with me and his peers about the issues that are important to young people locally. Congratulations again to Ammar. I am sure his time on the Kalkallo Youth Advisory Council has prepared him well for this new and exciting opportunity. This is an incredibly well deserved appointment, and I look forward to hearing about Ammar's experience and watching him excel.

Anzac Day

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:55): On another matter, last week I had the honour of attending the 2024 Anzac Day service in Craigieburn, where, along with the member for Greenvale, I laid a wreath on behalf of the Victorian government in memory of those who have served. In a service which grows in numbers every year, it was great to see so many people in attendance and the participation of emergency services, community groups and schools from Craigieburn and surrounds, including students from Mickleham Secondary College, Hume Anglican Grammar, Elevation Secondary College, Gilgai Plains Primary School and Our Lady's Primary School. I would like to thank Kevin O'Callaghan and all of the members of the Craigieburn War Memorial and Remembrance Committee, whose dedication and hard work made this incredibly important and touching service happen.

Timber industry

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:56): Coming into winter, we know that since the shutdown of native timber logging there are going to be people in regional Victoria that will probably have a shortage of firewood. I do have a solution to this; I have a very good solution to this. The other day a book landed in my office by the so-called respected Professor David Lindenmayer. I would encourage everyone in regional Victoria to go out, buy the book and burn it, because that is about where it belongs. I am going to give a copy of it to the former member for Narracan so he can burn it as well.

On the continuation of *The Forest Wars*, which is the title of that book, I was recently at a community event at Willow Grove. The residents of Willow Grove are getting extremely nervous because

Southern Rural Water are planning to plant 500 acres of trees. This community were very, very nervous in the 2009 Black Saturday fires. The only thing that stops bushfires reaching Willow Grove is Blue Rock Dam, and 500 acres of trees will put that community at risk. Here in the chamber I ask Southern Rural Water to re-evaluate that and put community above carbon. There are certain places where you have to put the community first.

Balcombe Grammar School

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:57): Lastly, on behalf of the member for Mornington, I would like to welcome Balcombe Grammar School to Parliament today. I hope they have an enjoyable day.

Anzac Day

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) (09:57): Anzac Day is always widely commemorated across the Williamstown electorate, and this year a different part of the Anzac Day story was highlighted. Thanks to an almost \$30,000 grant from the state government Victoria Remembers grants program, This Story Australia worked with the Williamstown Football Club to highlight the stories of four service personnel who play for or have played for or supported the Williamstown Football Club. This Story Australia is a charitable organisation that aims to provide better understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by many veterans throughout their service and upon their return to civilian life.

The project interviewed Private Danica Pedersen, who served during peacetime; Private Ernie Poole and Lieutenant Colonel David Catterall, who both served during the Vietnam conflict; and Private George Mazouris, who served in Korea. Each interview provides a unique perspective on service, the linking theme being of course the Williamstown Football Club. The initial compilation of the interviews aired on Anzac Day prior to the Williamstown versus Werribee match, where the Williamstown Seagulls triumphed over the Werribee Tigers 101–49. Sorry about that, Treasurer. The full 10-minute interviews will be released in the coming weeks.

I would also like to highlight and say thank you to the RSL branches in my electorate, who every year work tirelessly to support veterans and their families, as well as organising and coordinating Anzac Day and other commemorative services. Thank you to the Friends of Williamstown RSL and the Altona, Newport and Spotswood–Kingsville RSLs.

Anzac Day

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (09:59): I would like to rise to congratulate and thank my local RSLs for their amazing work over the Anzac Day ceremony season. It was very moving to listen to Jules ‘Gill’ Aussems, who shared his story at the Eltham dawn service, being a survivor of the tragic HMAS *Melbourne* and HMAS *Voyager* collision, which sliced HMAS *Voyager* in half. I thank him for his honest words regarding this terrible night on 10 February 1964 that went so horribly wrong. Eighty-two men died in this accident, the worst peacetime loss of life in our nation’s history.

Thank you to Ijsbrand Shepherd from Eltham College for his excellent playing of the *Reveille* and *Last Post*. I also want to express my gratitude to the many schools who were involved in both the dawn and family services at Petrie Park, Montmorency. Thank you to students Daneen Halley; Olivia Bhatia; Bethany Riggs; Molly Brennin; Luvinda Fandert; Mietta Franzmann; Lucy Moxon; Lia Reiger Morrice; Caelan Robertson; Josh Smith; Solveig Yen; Ruby Smith; Zahra Currie; Olivia Revell; Abbie Tomkins; Keegan Douglass; Nathan Campbell, who read *They Will Live On* by Eltham High’s Nova-Rae Lappin Torrellas; Remy Brent and Charlie Clarke. Your continued involvement in these services makes them such valued community commemoration.

Thank you to Jean Verso, who read a letter titled ‘Three local servicemen – mateship, marriage and loss in WWI’ at the Kangaroo Ground service, which shared the moving stories of survivors of battles

of Gallipoli. None of these important commemoration ceremonies happen without the hard work of our RSLs and our community groups. I would like to commend the work of Montmorency Eltham RSL, Diamond Creek RSL and Friends of Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park. *(Time expired)*

Pentridge opera

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:00): What do Luciano Pavarotti and Mark ‘Chopper’ Read have in common? Both of their spirits and essences have now graced the walls of the historic H division at Pentridge. On 9 April I was delighted to welcome the Melba Opera Trust for a first-of-a-kind opera performance at the unlocked and notoriously known H division at Pentridge in Coburg. A partnership with the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), the evening was truly an immersive experience within the historical bluestone walls, showcasing the very best young opera talent featuring Jesse Linke, Syrah Torii, Stephen Marsh and artistic director Sharolyn Kimmorley. I commend the Melba Opera Trust CEO Amy Black and her team for putting on a truly memorable evening.

Pascoe Vale electorate schools

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:01): On Friday 12 April I was very pleased to visit the brand new \$20.5 million Coburg Special Developmental School at 191 Urquhart Street in central Coburg ahead of its term 2 opening. Moving from its former site on the corner of Gaffney Street and Bishop Street, North Coburg, the school provides significantly increased capacity for 96 students across the north. In visiting I commended principal Warren Tofts, deputy principal Sally Smith and all the teachers, staff and students and families and wished them all the best in their new school.

On 27 March I visited Pascoe Vale Primary School to celebrate the pouring of the concrete foundations for the school’s new \$7.7 million indoor gym and basketball court.

On 26 March the member for Preston and I visited Newlands Primary School on Elizabeth Street to inspect the progress on the school’s landmark \$20 million upgrade, the biggest investment in the school’s history since 1951, which we are proud to be delivering.

John Mildren

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:02): John Barry Mildren OAM, 20 October 1932 to 25 April 2024, served as the federal Labor member for Ballarat from 1980 to 1990 with distinction. Significantly, when John won the seat of Ballarat for Labor in 1980 it was the first time since the ALP split of 1955, ending 25 continuous years of conservative Liberal representation. John’s election victories paved the way for many other successful state and federal Labor campaigns in the decades that followed. He literally wrote the blueprint for what Labor needed to do to win Ballarat. I am indebted to John and the committed Labor Party members, including the former Premier Steve Bracks, for the work they did to build trust in the Labor Party during that time. John was a wise and good man who was intelligent, compassionate and humble. He was committed to social justice and spoke to me often about the importance of members of Parliament always serving their community, words that I will never forget and will always live by.

After leaving public office John continued to serve numerous organisations, most notably Pinarc Disability Support. John was awarded life membership for his tireless advocacy work to support people with disabilities and their families. John also made great contributions to Alzheimer’s Australia, the Cornish Association of Victoria and the field naturalists. John was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the 2018 Australia Day honours for his service to the Parliament of Victoria and the community of Ballarat. Vale, John Mildren.

Anzac Day

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:03): It was an honour to visit Gallipoli for Anzac Day along with other Victorian members of Parliament and the Minister for Veterans. This year marks 109 years since the Anzacs landed at Gallipoli in World War I. At Anzac Cove, looking at the sheer cliff face, you can understand the impossible task that our diggers had ahead of them. The campaign was a baptism of

fire for the young Australian and New Zealand servicemen, and despite the odds they displayed remarkable courage, resilience and camaraderie. The Gallipoli campaign touched so many communities across Victoria, with brave young men enlisting with their friends and brothers to defend their country and too few returning home.

Eighty-four diggers from the Geelong region were killed during the eight-month Gallipoli campaign, and today I acknowledge Private John Bates, who lived in Little River and attended Lara State School and the Gordon Technical College in Geelong. He was killed in action on 8 May 1915 at Krithia, Gallipoli. He was 23. His name is inscribed on the memorial gates at the Lara Recreation Reserve, and he is remembered at the Helles Memorial on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

At the Lone Pine Memorial I laid a wreath on behalf of the Lara electorate, remembering those who have served and those who did not make it home. I had the honour to present a commemorative plaque on behalf of the Lara RSL to İsmail Kaşdemir, chairman of the Turkish Directorate of Gallipoli Historical Site, to commemorate the service of veterans from Lara who fought in the battles at Gallipoli. Thank you to Turkish ambassador Ufuk Gezer and consul general Doğan Işık for their support of our delegation.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the Norlane and Lara RSLs for their Anzac Day services, which attracted thousands of attendees. Today and every day, lest we forget.

Ballarat City Council

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:05): I rise in support of workers across Ballarat who meet today to fight for their rights. I am a proud member of the Australian Services Union. They have been negotiating with Ballarat City Council for over nine months on behalf of local council workers, and now it is time to make a stand. Ballarat City Council is the worst paying council in a major regional centre in Victoria. ASU members perform essential services across council. They collect our bins, they maintain our beloved parks and gardens and they serve our libraries, child care and the wonderful aquatic centre. ASU members love their work, and they understand how important it is to their community. I also stand in solidarity with members of the National Tertiary Education Union who meet today in the face of massive job losses from Federation University. Our workers deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

Business of the house

Standing and sessional orders

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

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended on 7, 14 and 15 May 2024 to allow:

- (1) the house to meet at 9:30 am on Tuesday 14 May
- (2) the matter of public importance to be omitted from the order of business for the week of Tuesday 14 May
- (3) the order of business to be:

Tuesday 7 May

Question time and constituency questions

Formal business

Statements by members

Government business

Tuesday 14 May

Formal business

Statements by members

Statements on committee reports

Government business

Question time and constituency questions (2 pm)

Government business continued

Wednesday 15 May

Formal business

Members statements

Government business

Question time and constituency questions (2 pm)

Government business continued

- (4) the Speaker to interrupt business under sessional order 2 at 5 pm on Wednesday 15 May.

We have a motion before this place to determine the arrangements for the delivery of the budget next Tuesday 7 May. This has been an innovation of our government, to introduce a single-day sitting where the Treasurer gets up and delivers the budget. We will lead off on the 7th with question time, then following that we will have the delivery of the budget. The opposition will have their chance to reply, and I will continue to work with the Manager of Opposition Business as the opposition determine the time at which they make that reply speech. We look forward to our Treasurer's budget. As always, the Allan Labor government will be focused on meeting the needs of the Victorian people. We also look forward to the Shadow Treasurer's fulsome response. I thought he spoke for 18 minutes, but I was corrected. Apparently it was only 13. Nonetheless, we look forward to hearing from the opposition spokesperson on the Treasury portfolio.

The reason for moving the delivery of the budget to a single day was to ensure that we had ample opportunities to be in our communities and to talk about the way in which our government continues to meet the needs of all Victorians, including in challenging times such as those that we are currently experiencing as we come off the back of a global pandemic. I commend this motion to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:09): I will only speak very, very briefly just to say thank you to the government for moving the motion. It will be an opportunity next week to consider the budget. I do note that the one difference between the year prior and this year will be that the government is forgoing their matter of public importance, and I appreciate the MPI being forgone because of the budget process. It will provide more of an opportunity for the house to debate the budget. I think that is a good thing, and I do acknowledge the government is doing that. The coalition will not be opposing the motion, and with that I will conclude my remarks.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:09): I am glad to hear that the opposition will not be opposing this motion. Obviously it is quite common sense. Every year the government outlines its priorities through people in this chamber approaching ministers and talking about their priorities for the budget and the financial year ahead. That then goes to an expenditure review committee, and the Treasurer announces his budget every year – so for the 2024–25 budget. This motion makes so much sense, to make it easy and efficient for that to happen. This year of course I would urge the opposition members not to rush up and take the stand and get on their soapbox. Have a read of the budget papers prior –

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: I am just speaking the facts here – nor miss the call, as happened last time. But I support this motion.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:10): I also support this motion. We all look forward to budget day and the time when the budget papers are put in our hot little hands. Sitting on the benches, we get to peel open that plastic and look through. For regional Victoria we have just got the index, the legend of how to read the map, over the top of our electorates and have actually zero allocated to our regions, which is of course what has happened in Gippsland East in previous years.

Members interjecting.

Emma KEALY: There are interesting interjections coming from across the chamber that this has never happened, and I urge members of the government to have a look over previous budgets and just see how little has been invested in regional Victoria. I understand that there may be very, very little invested in city seats as well. In fact I have heard that –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Emma KEALY: The Leader of the House has just said that I will be disappointed in this year's budget. Sadly, I am not surprised by that. In fact the only thing that surprises me is that we would have a Labor minister actually telling me before the budget that I am going to be disappointed. It is not just me. It is all of the voters in my electorate. It is the voters who are in regional Victoria. It is the people who expect funding for the Western Highway duplication. It is people who expect funding for the National Centre for Farmer Health. It is the people who are expecting investment in our health services right across the state. It is our people who want to make sure that there is –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do note that the member for Lowan has strayed somewhat from the narrow procedural debate and is anticipating what may or may not be in the budget papers. I ask that you call her back to the procedural debate that is before us.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, the debate is currently on the motion for budget day, not necessarily the budget itself. The member to continue on the motion.

Emma KEALY: We all will very much be looking through, scrawling through the pages, doing the searches for our communities for the projects that we have been fighting for and, if they are not there, of course holding the government to account for their failure once again to deliver a fair share for regional Victoria.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:13): I also rise to speak in favour of this motion. It is an important motion. It is always a very big day on the parliamentary calendar, the budget day, and it is important that we do have that day set aside. I know in the last few years it has changed around a few times – a bit earlier in May and later in May – but it is sort of a tradition to have it on the first Tuesday in May, the week before the federal budget. I am certainly looking forward to the Treasurer putting forward his 10th budget, what I am sure will again be a very well thought out and well planned Labor budget. I think it is very appropriate that, as the Leader of the House said, we then have the chance to talk to our communities immediately after that budget, in the days following budget day, to understand their responses to the budget and to speak particularly to the communities that are affected most.

Then we will return the following week, and I am looking forward to returning the following week, when we will hear the dulcet tones of the member for Sandringham. I am looking forward to his performance. I know last year there was a little bit of filibustering that needed to occur to make sure that the member for Sandringham was able to get his full allocation of time, not broken by the bells for lunchtime.

John Mullahy interjected.

Paul HAMER: That is right. The member for Glen Waverley reminds me that he did not actually use all of his allocated time. I am sure that is probably why he is not in the chamber at the moment; he is probably already preparing for the speech.

I am in anticipation of what a fantastic budget it will be. It is a good motion. It is really important to set out the procedures of the day. I am glad that the opposition will not be opposing it, and I look forward to the rest of the day.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:15): I rise to speak on this motion to put procedures in place for the budget next week. It is important that we do that, because this budget of course is probably going to be highlighted by the fact that it is going to be full of red lines and lots of little brackets. I think Victorians will in fact be looking forward to understanding the full extent of things such as the Minister for Health's secret phone calls to everybody advising them to cut their budgets and pull in their belts, those sorts of phone calls that she has not put in writing and she has not put in emails but has certainly made to her various CEOs across the hospital network, saying, 'You've got to find those savings.' So it will be interesting to see in the budget –

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is nowhere near the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Polwarth has strayed somewhat from the motion at hand, and if he could come back to it, that would be appreciated.

A member interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: That is right. This side of the house certainly does not support the flagrant waste of taxpayers money that this budget will reveal. The Minister for Health is quite right; we definitely will not support the flagrant waste of budgetary finances and scarce resources that we are expecting to see in this budget.

It is an important opportunity for us to further analyse the processes of the budget. Unfortunately this budget motion probably does not allow enough time for the opposition to publicly question the government on its priorities or the way it has set about spending scarce resources for the people of Victoria. With that, we look forward to the opportunity to put forward to the people of Victoria over the next couple of weeks the dire straits, the dire conditions, that they are going to have to deal with. Certainly regional Victorians will be looking to see whether the promises around roads and other essential services are delivered.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (10:18): It gives me great pleasure this morning to rise in support of this motion to do the work and to set up the necessary procedures to make sure that budget day runs smoothly. Now, I think that we would all agree in this place, on this side of the house and on the other side of the house as well, that there is no more important day for the prosperity of Victorians than budget day. It is incredibly important that we rise here today and that we debate this motion, so that we can set up budget day to have it run smoothly, to have question time when it needs to be, to have the budget when it needs to be, because that is what is incredibly important for Victorians. Every Victorian, including my constituents of Tarneit, Hoppers Crossing and Mount Cottrell, relies on us to do that. That is why those on this side of the house are here. That is why we are here. We are here to represent our communities; we are here to advocate for the infrastructure, for the projects and for the programs that matter to them. That is fundamentally culminated in the budget, and that is why we are all here.

Once again, I speak in support of this motion. I acknowledge that the opposition benches are in support of the motion as well. I, like everybody else, cannot wait to attend here next Tuesday – very excited – to have the day run smoothly and to see all of the projects and all of the fantastic things that will be delivered not just for Tarneit but for all Victorians, for the outer west, for the growing suburbs. That is why we are here, and that is why I am in support of this motion. Once again, I rise in support of this motion and I commend it to the house.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (10:20): What a quizzical motion.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: I am feeling the love from the government benches! I am really interested to see what will come in next week's budget, but I am really interested, as the Shadow Minister for Public Transport, as to what Melbourne and Victorian commuters might see in this budget and what we are probably not going to see in this budget as a result. Where is the western rail duplication plan that this government announced seven years ago? Is that going to be in this budget as part of this bill? Remember the quadruplication that was going to happen to Melton?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, while we note the member is very much up and about this week for reasons that are quite unknown at this point, I do request that you bring him back to debating the motion at hand. He should not be discussing or pre-empting what may or may not be in the budget but indeed be confining his remarks to the narrow nature of the motion before the house.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the coalition did not call out the drivel of the government speakers and their wideranging contributions –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Brighton!

James Newbury: It has been slightly wideranging, and I put it to you that some latitude is afforded.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It has been slightly wider ranging than the motion, but let us all try to stay on the motion, member for Bulleen.

Matthew GUY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker; I certainly will. I raise in relation to this motion what has been in this chamber on previous budgets. It is a motion about budgets, so let us talk about budgets. That is what the motion is about, so let us talk about it. The member for Macedon may not have been here for many of those, but some of us have seen these motions before, and they have been very similar to this. So maybe the western rail duplication, which is a broken promise, might be in the budget and might be part of this motion. Maybe the Bunyip River duplication, which was not in the last one, will be in this one. It is not pre-empting, it is asking a legitimate question. Maybe the member for Macedon does not want that question asked. I could understand why: because it is a broken promise. The Murray Basin rail plan has been abandoned by this government. They can build the Suburban Rail Loop, but they will not look after regional Victoria rail, will they. Here he is, the member for Indian students.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bulleen knows better.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the motion is a narrow motion about the timing of the budget in the sitting week, not what is contained in potential budgets. The member should come back to the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. The member for Bulleen will come to the motion.

Matthew GUY: The timing of the motion is very important, because timing is very important and the timing of this budget should be relevant for those people in Geelong who are missing out on fast rail, so they will be interested in the timing of this motion. We will also be very interested to see in this budget what Victoria's debt figures will be, because as we know, they are more than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. The Treasurer has presided over more debt being accumulated under his watch than any state treasurer in Australian political history. We will be very interested to see what comes in this budget next week and the timing of this motion.

My concluding comments: it is very interesting to note that the government can give it but they cannot take it. They can give out all the abuse in the world and they can give wideranging speeches, but they cannot take it. That is a government who is on its last legs. That is a government that will not be here in three years time.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:25): I did think this was a debate about the procedural elements of how budget day will transpire. Maybe I am wrong. Am I wrong? Am I right? I am right. I am going to focus on budget day and making sure that everyone is really clear about how that day will unfold, and I am really glad that we do have agreement. Ostensibly we do, on all sides of the chamber, have a sense of unity. It may not happen as often as we would like, but at the same time we are here to put forward and fight for our communities and to advocate very hard on their behalf.

On that front, I will say I am very much looking forward to budget day and looking forward to the Treasurer handing down the budget. I know he has been working extremely hard, as have all members on this side of the house. I am not suggesting those on the other side of the house have not; I can only speak for my colleagues. I know we have been working really hard, fighting for our communities, to make sure we can get the best possible outcome in spite of global economic circumstances, in spite of the aftermath of COVID and rising inflation. We are all working extraordinarily hard, and I know particularly the Treasurer is very mindful of making sure that we deliver in terms of protecting jobs

and services for our community. This is what we are about as Labor members, so in that regard we are very much looking forward to being able to see the Treasurer hand down the budget on budget day. It will be absolutely outstanding to watch. I am really excited. I cannot wait actually. How many sleeps is that? Goodness me. I am waiting with bated breath. But I am going to try and contain my excitement, because there is a lot of good hard work to do.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Five sleeps. There is a lot of hard work to be done today as well to continue. This is part of that work. It is important because we are also being very transparent and up-front with communities. They know that budget will be handed down on 7 May. I think this is really important as well. I know my colleagues are going to share in the excitement, but we will get through the next five sleeps. I think we can get there. Yes, we can. We will all be here bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, we will be ready and we will be looking at the Treasurer and hanging off every word. On that note, I commend the motion to the house.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (10:27): I rise to speak on this motion for the timing of the budget next week. I will note that the member for Box Hill said this will be a typical Labor budget. I assume that that means, just like last year with the Commonwealth Games, there will be more blown-out projects that will get moved across to contingency and hidden amongst the deep dark pages of the budget. We saw multiple billion dollars hidden last year.

When you talk about the timing of the budget, this budget could not come sooner, assuming it is going to be bad, but I would like to see a budget that actually brings some relief for our tourism sector. The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events wants to go out alongside his mates at Visit Victoria and spruik that the tourism numbers in this state are fantastic, the spend is up and it is all going so well, but the facts that they continue to ignore are that, when you talk about timings, year to date, February 2024 – the first full block since COVID – compared to February 2020, we are still down half a million international visitors coming back to this state to the same time in 2020. You can spruik the numbers all you want, but the visitors just are not coming back. Visit Victoria, with their Every Bit Different campaign, has got a lot of work to do to try to get those visitors back to this state.

I want to see proper funding for that tourism sector. The government wants to spruik, like the Minister for Small Business yesterday in question time, just how fantastic small business is going. For tourism sector small businesses, June 2023 – the last financial year that we experienced – 4500 tourism businesses we were down in this state, more than 4 per cent, the highest of any state. The timing of the budget is very important, assuming that budget brings some support for that sector. That is what we want to see. I do not think it is going to come for those members of the tourism sector next week. I do not think it is going to be a budget that helps them very much. But I guess only time will tell. As the member for Albert Park said, five sleeps. You guys might think on that side of the chamber that it is going to be all nice and rosy in five days time, but I think the next five days are going to include a lot of nightmares for all Victorians.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (10:30): I heard his serve was a lot better than that; I think we have been conned. But anyway, it is a pleasure to speak on this motion because I always enjoy budget day. I used to say budget was like Christmas Day for political types. I think the important thing about the state budget is that it is a statement of priorities of the government. If you look at all of the budgets handed down by this government, we have prioritised health and education and jobs and transport and major projects. We have prioritised the future of a growing capital city of a growing state. We have had a firm eye on the future in every budget that we have handed down. But of course we have also prioritised, throughout all of our budgets, ending the epidemic of family violence. That has been a central mission of this government. I am sure that we are going to see similar priorities laid out in the next budget. Budget day is going to be a really good day.

I remember a few shenanigans around the time of the last budget, because I not only look forward to budget day, I also look forward to the budget reply. I look forward to hearing the member for Sandringham give his budget reply. Unfortunately, I remember the day that the member for Sandringham was supposed to be giving his budget reply last time. There was a lot of time wasting in this chamber in the morning, which meant that the budget reply was delayed and delayed and delayed. I remember looking at the member for Sandringham sitting in this chamber not knowing if he were Arthur or Martha, him thinking, 'What are my colleagues doing, delaying my budget reply?'

Members interjecting.

Nick STAIKOS: Not our Martha. That was very quick, member for Lowan. I will give you that. That was good; very nice. I will also say this: I have often wondered what it would be like to be in the wilderness opposite, because I have only experienced a budget from government. But I have to say –

Members interjecting.

Nick STAIKOS: Yes, okay member for Lowan. But I know that you guys live vicariously through us. Many a time have I been to a Labor ribbon cutting or a Labor sod turn and I have spotted a member of the opposition there, living vicariously through members of this government, wondering what it would be like to be sitting on this side of the house. I do not think they are ever going to experience it. But I am looking forward to budget day. It will be a great day – bring it on. Five more sleeps, I think you said, member for Albert Park. I am very much looking forward to it.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:33): I rise to assure the house that there is no-one in the chamber more excited than me to hear about the budget session, because from this point on, as members know, I spend the next four weeks locked down in this place.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: While the Leader of the House is being generous, she might like to congratulate me because it is my 10th anniversary this year. As I have said to my side, there are people who get less for murder than being on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for 10 years. But what I am seeing here in this debate going on today, which I do not think we have ever debated before in my time in this chamber, is the padding. What we are seeing is a couple of ministers teaching the backbench how to pad. That is what I get used to in PAEC, because the government never actually wants to answer any questions; they just pad. To the extent of when the former minister Martin Foley was here –

James Newbury interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: The member for Brighton remembers it well. I asked him one day what the time was, and he explained how the watch worked. Seriously, he would have to have been the slowest, most boring minister we have had before PAEC, and that is saying something.

A member: Have you met Gavin Jennings?

Danny O'BRIEN: The Beard was pretty good too actually. They do this to avoid scrutiny. They have got a few on the backbench who are there on the committee as well, and there are a few who used to be on the committee and they know what to do. They know just to sit there and read the question given to them by the Premier's private office – 'Don't deviate from it, because you do what you're told'. Then if the opposition looks at any stage like they are actually getting anywhere with a question, they quickly raise a point of order. Come in spinner, member for Yan Yean, because you are one of the best at it. Take a point of order and shut down the line of questioning so that Victorians do not find out what is actually in the details of the budget. I have had the pleasure –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on the topic of points of order, as much as we do enjoy the opportunity to be at PAEC with the member for Gippsland South, I do ask that you

bring him back to the motion that is before the house, which as we all know is a narrow procedural motion. We do not really need a –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Leader of the House. I think it was relevance, and the member had strayed somewhat from the motion and could come back.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. While I never question your interpretation of things, this is not a procedural debate; this is a debate about what the Parliament will be doing in the next couple of weeks. It is not a procedural debate. If it was a procedural debate, we would be done by now.

A member interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: We would have had 30 minutes. The Deputy Speaker is very much aware of that. That is why I have 10 minutes to speak now. We are talking about this motion that will set out the time frames, and the time frames include the budget hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I might go to another issue here, again going to timing issues. Once again we are seeing the government-controlled committee reducing scrutiny by reducing the hours for the ministers that they want to protect.

A member interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is absolutely true. We had a big debate this year because the time line allocated for the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Education, has been reduced by half an hour. We have 3 hours for the Treasurer, we have 2½ hours for the Premier, but for the second-biggest portfolio spend in the budget, we have an hour and a half. We had the hapless Labor members of the committee trying to argue, 'Oh, it's because he's Deputy Premier; that's why James Merlino had 2 hours' –

Lauren Kathage: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do not think the deliberations of the committee should be discussed in the chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is? Committee discussions.

Lauren Kathage: Relevance.

James Newbury: Further on the point of order, Deputy Speaker, there was no point of order, other than the government are embarrassed that they have just been caught.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to continue on the motion.

Danny O'BRIEN: On the motion, which sets out the structure of the budget arrangements for the next couple of weeks, including the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. We have got half an hour less for the education minister – and this is not deliberations, this is all on the public record. We have half an hour less for the Assistant Treasurer, so we are not doing that much on the Assistant Treasurer. We have half an hour less for the Minister for Skills and TAFE. We have got 15 minutes less for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, which I am very disappointed about. I could do 3 hours on the Minister for Roads and Road Safety given the cuts there have been in that portfolio. We have had the Minister for Local Government, the same minister, also reduced by half an hour. Apparently she does not think there is enough to talk about in that portfolio. In total this year the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings will apply 3 hours less scrutiny to this government. Bearing in mind, though, 54 hours we have – like I said, you get less for murder – and more than half of it is applied to government members asking Dorothy Dixers. With the exception of perhaps Mrs McArthur in the other place, both of us having to come down from our regional electorates for this period of time, I would like to have more time to scrutinise the budget papers. Unfortunately this is the way the government does it, just like they have tried this week to shut non-government members

down from even putting things on the record. We see time and again the government trying to shut us down.

This is a situation where what is being done in the budget in the next few weeks is of concern not only to all Victorians but of course to my electorate of Gippsland South. We want to see a whole range of things that we have been fighting for for a long time, such as a new Sale College – the government committed to the master plan in previous budgets, but where is the funding for a new Sale College? I must say I am not optimistic about some of these. A rebuild of Foster Primary School. Additional train services to and from Sale were promised by the government in the network development plan several years ago. As the member for Bulleen has indicated, the Regional Rail Revival was announced in 2017 as shovel ready and ready to go but has still not finished in Gippsland seven years later. We are still waiting for additional services to be announced in the budget, as reflected in the motion that we are talking about. We are waiting for new fire stations for Mirboo North and Foster. We want to see something done about kamikaze corner in Leongatha, the stage 2 of the alternative heavy vehicle route.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think you can anticipate my point of order, which is that the member is now running through his shopping list of budget items.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have strayed a little again from the motion.

Danny O'BRIEN: As I indicated as I was running through the shopping list, it was related to the motion, which is when the budget is going to be delivered on 7 May. There are just two more: the Mirboo North gymnasium and local road improvements with a Toora overtaking lane, which the government has not committed to and we would like to see when the budget comes. We would also like to see a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that can do its job and hold the government and the public service to account. I remind those opposite again: this is not just about the executive members of the Parliament, it is about holding the public service to account as well and getting the answers that Victorians deserve when the state budget is \$178 billion in debt – and probably more after next week. Victorians deserve answers. They deserve the opportunity to have those questions answered.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:41): It is a great pleasure to rise today to speak on the motion, an important motion that sets out the timetable for the delivering of the budget. I think it is the Treasurer's 10th budget – fantastic – a significant milestone for a good friend of mine. I know the Treasurer has worked incredibly hard to get this budget ready – a big thanks to the Treasurer, to his office and of course to the entire department and departments across the government for working tirelessly to deliver another Labor budget. This motion talks about what the next sitting week looks like – a little different, as has been done always, to ensure proper consideration and time is given to the budget.

As we know, budgets are about priorities. This is my sixth budget as the member for Bayswater, and I am very proud to now be in my second term. I can tell you now, if you look across the electorate – and members have spoken about some items that have been funded through the budget – you see what the priorities are of this government. If you look within my local area in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne – the best part of the world; others can have arguments, I am sure – this government's priorities have been health care, education, transport and delivering good local jobs where people need them.

We have delivered upgrades to schools like Templeton Primary, currently under construction, and Fairhills High – Deputy Speaker, I think you are a former alumnus – and at Wantirna College we are getting on with building a new double-court competition-grade gym. I am just enlightening the house on some of the things from budgets that the Labor government have delivered and are getting on with. What we are getting on with is making sure we are continuing to build the Education State. Like the Minister for Health reflected on previously, I am very, very proud that when it comes to health care we are upgrading the Angliss Hospital. It is much, much loved, the Angliss Hospital. It is now in its

83rd or 84th year; I remember being there for its 80th birthday. It is a beautiful hospital. A big shout-out to all the healthcare workers, who will continue to receive support and who will continue to be backed in by this Allan Labor government through another Labor budget, which the Treasurer will hand down next week. We are also building new hospitals right across the state. The budget will continue to do that hard, important work. Also –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, I note that the member on his feet is talking about hospitals, but the Maroondah Hospital was promised in 2018 and still has not had a dollar allocated to fixing it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Evelyn. You are straying outside the point of order. I encourage the member for Bayswater to come back to the motion, even though this has become rather broad.

Jackson TAYLOR: Absolutely. On the motion, when we talk about budgets it is important to talk about education. Just a few minutes ago my partner was texting me a few photos of my little bubba George; he is having his solids for the day. I think his favourite at the moment is pear and maybe a bit of corn. But it reminded me of one of the most important things that this government has delivered, and that our son George will be the beneficiary of, and that is three-year old kinder and a pre-prep program. That is a profound investment in the lives of young people. That is the biggest change to early years education and to education anywhere in this country. You look around the rest of Australia and everyone is copying the fine work of Victoria because they know that the first five years of life for any child are some of the most, if not the most, important years in which to give them the best start in life. My little bubba George, and everyone who has got young kids not just in this place but right across this state, will be the beneficiary of that, making sure they have got the best start in life.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I also have young kids, and this budget is completely ruining my kids' future.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jackson TAYLOR: Deputy Speaker, through you, I give my best to the member for Nepean's kids. I am sure he is a fantastic father. It is always good to see him on his feet, even if they are not really points of order.

As I have said, budgets are absolutely about priorities. I am very proud to be a part of this Allan Labor government that is getting on and delivering not just for my community but for the member for Mordialloc's community and for the member for Albert Park, the member for Pascoe Vale, the member for Kororoit and the member for Mulgrave – it is all happening. And we are delivering over there as well.

Members interjecting.

Jackson TAYLOR: Well, I am starting with the people closest to me, immediately around me, but I am sure we are absolutely getting on with delivering for Brighton, for Sandringham and for Nepean. That is because this government is delivering for all Victorians. What I will say is I have heard some of the commentary, which I hear every single year, about this government. I hear some of the commentary from those opposite, and I heard the same thing in 2018. I heard the same thing in 2022 –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do think we are straying. And just for context, I think the government forgot Brighton from the index last year in the budget.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to come back to the motion.

Jackson TAYLOR: I was just responding to comments from some of those opposite about this government. Yet this government keeps getting re-elected despite the protestations from some of those opposite, and that is because we are out in our communities. We are active local members, we are out there and we are delivering on priorities for communities right across this state. Whether it is in

metropolitan Melbourne or whether it is in regional Victoria we are getting on and getting the job done. It is as simple as that. I am very much looking forward to the Treasurer handing down the budget next week. It will be a very thoughtful, considered budget. This motion sets about the process for making sure we have all got time to get back out there into communities and obviously have a chat to our communities about how the budget is continuing to deliver for all Victorians.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:48): I rise to speak on the laughing matter that is this motion, because quite frankly this demonstrates that this tired Allan Labor government has got absolutely no legislative agenda – nothing to talk about. So what do they do? They get up in the morning and they whip out this motion, which talks about the timing and the apparent aspiration to have a smooth running for budget day. What a joke. On the timing of budget day, it is quite important. The reason that we talk about the timing of budget day – and I have suggested this might be why the Allan Labor government wants to talk about the timing of budget day on 7 May – is pertinent because we will probably find out how much more this government wants to tax Victorians and how much more debt we will be seeing. We are tracking towards \$200 billion of debt under the tired Allan Labor government. Quite frankly that is devastating because it is going to be a terrible burden left to our children and grandchildren to pay back this massive debt. It is all about spending more and taxing Victorians more.

There are many Victorians who are interested in what is in the budget and who are concerned about what is going to be put down in the budget on 7 May, because we believe that in its time this tired Labor government – a decade-old Labor government – has introduced 53 new or increased taxes. We think that on 7 May, when this budget is handed down, we will see more taxes. Life will be harder under this Allan Labor government, because they spend more and tax Victorians more – that is the only way. For this government the only options available are to tax more or cut. There will be cuts in the budget. We know there will be cuts. We are already hearing widespread concern about the cuts to health care, cuts to education. That is going to be heard on 7 May when this budget is handed down. This will be a tough budget for Victorians, and quite frankly they deserve more. All we will see is more taxes. We have got 53 new or increased taxes, and there is a bit of a book going around to see how many more taxes this Allan Labor government will be increasing next week, on 7 May.

The previous member on his feet talked about having proper time to consider the budget. Yet in terms of the budget process and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process, this government are so worried about what questions they are going to be asked, so determined to avoid all scrutiny on the budget, that they have constrained the time allowed for questions from opposition members on the budget through the PAEC process. What are they scared of? What are they hiding? If they are going to be proud of this budget, why not open the PAEC process even more? Why not invite more questions about the budget if there is stuff to spruik? I think that they all know there is not going to be much to spruik in this budget.

Certainly the residents of the Evelyn electorate are quite worried about this. The cost-of-living crisis is front and centre of mind. And what drives cost of living? It is the inflationary impacts of this government's big-spending agenda. They love big – they love the Big Build, the Big Housing Build. They love big spend and big debt and big taxes, which are only going to hurt Victorians more. Frankly they do not give a stuff about Victorians, and you can see that in what comes out in the budget. I know that on 7 May, when this budget is handed down, they frankly will not give a stuff about Victorians and the cost-of-living issues that they are going through right now.

We have a health crisis. People cannot get their surgery done. We have kids in my electorate who are going to school in buildings ridden with asbestos. We write to the minister, we write to the minister again and we raise questions in this Parliament, but they do not care about the children and the teachers in my community who are having to go to school in asbestos-ridden things. In 2014 the Labor Party promised Victorians that they would remove asbestos from all schools. Well, come out to the Evelyn electorate and you will find schools ridden with asbestos. They have broken that promise from 2014.

The previous member on his feet, the member for Bayswater, talked about hospitals. The Maroondah Hospital – they tried, embarrassingly, to take away the Indigenous name of that hospital and rebadge as the QE2 hospital. That was a promise in 2018. We are in 2024 and there has been nothing done on the Maroondah Hospital. That is the biggest major public hospital for the members of my community, and frankly we have no knowledge of when this hospital will even start to scope the works required to upgrade that hospital. All we know about that hospital is that the ambulances are ramping all of the time. We know paramedics are upset.

Last budget public sector wages blew out to nearly \$38 billion. We will be keeping a keen eye on 7 May, next week, as to what the public sector wages bill will look like, because we know that they are cutting public service jobs but the public sector wages bill is going up. This is going to be something very important for us to look at, because it demonstrates how this government cannot manage money. They cannot manage money. They cannot manage projects – billions and billions and billions of dollars over budget on major projects. We will all see in the budget on 7 May, next week, how much more each of these projects has blown out by – billions and billions of dollars of budget blowouts. And any bets that next week all we will see in this budget will be red, red, red and more red – not because it is the red of the Labor Party but because it is the red of debt. Taxes, budget blowouts – that is what we will see in the budget next week.

My community will be desperate to see if this government cares at all about the road safety of motorists and pedestrians in my community. Will they finally, once and for all, commit to actually upgrading the dangerous intersection at Maroondah Highway and Killara Road in Coldstream? Will they actually have any care in the world for the people that live in my community and upgrade the Warburton Highway at Seville East and for the students who are forced to cross from the bus on the Warburton Highway with low visibility because this government will not spend just a few million dollars? They will spend \$200 billion on the Suburban Rail Loop, a project that has no business case whatsoever. They will spend \$200 billion on that. Quite frankly I do not think any of us will ever see it built in our lifetimes. It does nothing for residents in my community. An underground train line from Box Hill to Cheltenham does nothing for the people of Mooroolbark and Lilydale and beyond. What we want to see is, quite frankly, putting that money – \$200 billion could go into the road upgrades to those known dangerous roads, roads where we have had multiple fatalities, roads that this Labor government has done nothing about fixing, to actually upgrade these dangerous roads in my community.

Also this government could allocate some of the money from the \$200 billion inner city Suburban Rail Loop to upgrading the digital connectivity throughout the Yarra Ranges. I hear the member for Monbulk constantly trying to bag the power companies about this, but this government has done nothing. They know in the Yarra Ranges we have poor digital connectivity and poor telecommunications, that when we have bushfires or storms we are completely at risk. This government has loved the headline but does nothing on the delivery. So we would like to see the money on that.

Also, flooding – our community has been subject to a lot of flooding. The state government has a lot of responsibility when it comes to some of the state-owned drainage infrastructure. The Lilydale open drain is an example. This government does not care about even clearing the weeds, and hundreds of residents – about a thousand residents in Lilydale – get flooded every time it rains, because Melbourne Water failed to upgrade and fix and clear the drains that they are responsible for. These are the things that impact people's everyday lives, and frankly this government should be embarrassed that it has got nothing to talk about and wants to talk about the timings of the budget on budget day.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:57): I see the look of exasperation on the Deputy Speaker's face on the broad, wideranging contributions. I will try to keep my contributions to the motion. It is a bit ironic that those that criticise a narrow motion and time allocation give such fulsome contributions. You did see as soon as the second speaker got up there was FOMO from the member for Brighton. Did you see that? He gave a minute, and he thought, 'Oh, I had another nine in me.' He just thought,

‘This is nice and short and sharp,’ and the FOMO was just resonating, and that is why there have been points of order. He just wants to get back.

I have got a recommendation as a part of this motion, because I think it is important to consider the layout of the day. I think the Shadow Treasurer gives the speech on the Tuesday or the Wednesday, is it? By that time you are sort of zoning off into Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) land. But I think the reply should be not like the chief of staff now to the Leader of the Opposition. Remember that time when they jumped up? The former member for Ripon jumped up within 15 minutes and gave a fulsome debate – more than the 6 minutes and 46 seconds that the member for Sandringham gave last budget – but it was all over the place and went on about taxes. I think it was 53, the member for Evelyn is saying now. But I have got a recommendation on the program. It is not for me to give a bit of advice on how the day should run for those opposite, but I reckon on the Tuesday there is something that they are missing, because I have been sitting here and I have seen the member for Bulleen give some fulsome contributions this week. I am telling you – hairs on the back of your neck. It is spine-tingling. You know, he has got that gravitas; he has got the roar. The lion of Bulleen is back; the bison of Bulleen is back in action. I think there is a bit of energy in this place when the member for Bulleen comes in. So I reckon the member for Sandringham, with the dulcet tones that are very nicely suited for radio –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am very happy to share with the member for Mordialloc and any member who would like to listen to my dulcet tones, but surely, as far-ranging and wide as the debate we have put up with is, what is the relevance of the member for Mordialloc’s contribution to the motion before the chamber? What is it?

Tim RICHARDSON: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I was actually talking about how the program runs. I think I have been the closest to the motion we have seen so far.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, the member for Mordialloc’s point is not missed, and he was actually on the motion as far as anyone else.

Tim RICHARDSON: We are not needing the indulgence of the dulcet tones of the member for Sandringham, which we have all come to enjoy. The doorstops, the pregnant pauses, the emphasis, the hands – he is the Toastmasters alumnus if you ever saw one. It gives me goosebumps. As his neighbouring electorate member I sometimes look over and go, ‘I wish. I wish I could be like the dulcet tones of Sandringham.’ But no, they get a bit rough in Mordy, but they still front up each and every day, my constituents.

On the recommendation on this motion I reckon that Tuesday would be a bit better if you gave 30 minutes to the member for Bulleen. I give credit. You could see all of us really up and about and zoned in when the member for Bulleen gave 10 minutes on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. You could see us zoned in. We were really intent. Even those opposite were – we finally got a bit of a turn-up from their show. So I reckon do that on Tuesday or Wednesday, rather than the member for Sandringham reheating – I will not make that pun but he did put up a Facebook post about microwave dinners and meal prep – his speech from last year. Do not worry about it – he has been practising with his doorstops and his speeches. Get the member for Bulleen in.

We have seen some impostor syndrome issues, though, coming from the member for Malvern. We see that every now and then he has an attempt to just come through. His popularity could not be any further south unfortunately, so I do not think he will get a call-up. He will be on the back stalls. When we go on to the take-note – that is the former Treasurer – he will be at the back stalls of that.

I think there was another powerful contribution yesterday. Not to give you a bit of bayside rivalry, not to turn it up, but the member for Brighton was up and about yesterday. No-one could actually hear their own minds think because the member for Brighton was so loud and booming. I have been on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee with the member for Brighton, and he does the work – not as much as the member for Gippsland South, I will say. Full stops and commas – give us a spell, you

are not revolutionising the place. But the member for Brighton I think could give a fulsome contribution and was up and about yesterday.

The talk about PAEC is interesting, because PAEC is a big part of this work. I certainly have not done 10 years. When you volunteer to keep going back onto PAEC, you have to really check the member for Gippsland South's priorities. He puts it up as a badge of honour, and we sort of all look sideways and go, 'Four years is enough, mate. Ten years – what are you doing this to yourself for?' At least the member for Brighton actually got grabs. Sometimes he would put his feet up on the desk. Sometimes he would be loud and roaring and would carry on, but the member for Gippsland South maybe needs to just come out of his shell a bit more. I know sometimes with the questions that come forward you see the exasperation of these poor PAEC members on the coalition side, because they get some of the worst questions. You can see them on the run going, 'Is this what I've been dished up to work with for the next 18 minutes?' You can see the member for Gippsland South feverishly going through it, looking across at Bev McArthur, the member in the other place – Western Victoria – and then looking at the member for Brighton and going, 'We're going to have to carry the team today; this is going to be a long day.' You can see it is a challenge. Maybe it is not always about time, maybe it is about the quality of the offering, so maybe rather than everybody getting their 5 minutes of fame – they share around their questions because all the egos are so big in the room during PAEC that they have all got to have a bit of a go – maybe they can be a little more focused.

The budget is a really important opportunity. It is the 10th budget – not the 10th on PAEC – but the schedule, the program, is really important. You can feel the significance of such a moment, and it is important. The member for Sandringham will in all seriousness make an important contribution. It is a moment in time for Victorians to scrutinise where the state is at. There is a bit of political posturing and hubris and all that, but it is about the opportunities that present and the choices that are made. Sometimes that is lost in some of the discussion and debate, how important that is, but it is really the grand final of all we do. All of the work that comes forward, all of the programs that are put forward and all of the choices that are made really boil down to that speech and then the reply that is made and the seriousness with which it is taken by those opposite.

I will say that the member for Sandringham, in his contributions and the work that will be put forward and his team and his staff, is really important in that with the week and how it runs with the PAEC briefing with the Department of Treasury and Finance. If anyone is thinking, 'Should I go in for that breakfast on that Tuesday morning?', it is a really important session to get that from Treasury and understand, of the \$90 billion-plus allocation in revenue that we put forward, the choices that are made. That has grown significantly from the first time I was in here; I think the last Baillieu–Naphthine government budget was about \$43 billion. It just shows the significance of the Victorian economy and how much we have grown over that time, the Victorians that we have welcomed in and the jobs that have been created throughout that time. It is a really important session and time from when the Treasurer stands up in this place, starts that debate and opens it up for members to reflect on.

You see already some of the posturing and different things that come up, but it is a really important opportunity for all of us to reflect. It will be the 10th budget for the class of 2014. I particularly give a shout-out to really close colleagues and people I love and admire: the member for Carrum, the member for Frankston and the member for Bentleigh. We have been on a journey together of seeing our communities transform over that time. We all reflect on that moment, from the times that we were first in here and how the session was run, to the great opportunity that our communities have given us to be here for our 10th budget, an opportunity to keep delivering for our communities. It is a really important thing.

For the people that tune in in budget week and that program, if you wanted to hear the weather or the wheat report on the back end of the ABC, you would ask the member for Sandringham to read it out, because it would put you into calm ASMR territory, wouldn't it? He has the dulcet tones, the gravitas. But I think if we want the viewership through Parliament broadcasting, we need to get the tickets sold for the member for Bulleen's presentation. I think there will be a late call-up on the Tuesday, get the

speech, and the first reply is 'Get the member for Bulleen back.' It was Meatloaf that said 'Two out of three ain't bad', right? But I am a believer. I am a believer in the member for Bulleen. I reckon he has got a third in him. I reckon he can bring it home. I know we do not have the former member for Kew anymore, who pumped him up and said, 'You can have another crack,' but maybe he has had a look at some internal polling and is saying, 'You know what, I reckon I can have a dance. I reckon I can go,' and that is why we have got him back in. That is why he is the new-age guy, the member for Bulleen, and I am the number one ticketholder for that.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (11:07): I am very much looking forward to my first budget as the new member for Warrandyte. Eight months in I am even looking forward to speaking on this motion. I appreciate that it is a procedural debate. I appreciate that in this place there are conventions, there are niceties and there are things that we do that are part of the tradition of Parliament. It was so shocking therefore to me on Tuesday, our first day back after one month's sitting break, that in the spirit of Parliament, in the spirit of these conventions and these niceties, those opposite sought to quash and to gag and to stop us from bringing all of the motions forward from this side of Parliament. They would not even let their buddies in the Greens speak. I so appreciate, as we are talking about in the procedural debate the timing for next week's budget, that they are so in favour of keeping to these things. It is wonderful that they have rules for themselves but not for us – so wonderful for you.

The motion that we are speaking about is setting the timing for the budget, and I am glad that we are talking about timing, because timing is something that I am very interested in. The people in my community have been waiting and waiting and waiting and wondering when is the time that you will fix Five Ways intersection in Warrandyte South. We have been left waiting time and time again. The candidate for Warrandyte from the other side made a commitment as the federal candidate for Menzies that as part of their government, if they were elected, they would fund the Five Ways intersection, but we found that to be a complete untruth. When the federal member for Menzies went to the minister for roads in the federal Parliament and asked, 'Okay, this commitment, which you've made as an election commitment, when are you going to fund it?', 'It was actually never tabled. It was actually never raised with us, so we won't be funding it.' We are still waiting. The time is still there. We are still waiting for this to be fixed. I do wonder, I do ask the government, when will this time be? Will it be when there is another casualty? Will it be when there is another road incident? Will there be another call-out? Will it be that we have to wait and wait and wait?

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I too am waiting – for us to come back to the debate. I make a point of order on relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is not actually a procedural debate. The member for Warrandyte to proceed on the motion.

Nicole WERNER: We are speaking about timing. We are speaking about the budget; we are speaking about that happening next week. I am speaking about what I hope to see in the budget for my community, which I have been fighting for day in day out in this place. Six times I have raised it in Parliament – Five Ways intersection – and time and time again the minister for copy and paste, otherwise known as the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, will give me the same response. They advise that, 'Due to the complex geometry and physical constraints, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We won't do it because it's not one of our seats and we can't pork-barrel in your seat.' Well, we are still waiting. We are still waiting for Five Ways intersection to be fixed, so I will keep fighting in this place until we see it fixed, because it is a priority for my community.

Speaking of timing, there are other things that we are also waiting for. At Warrandyte CFA they are waiting for a new tanker. It is 20 years that they have been waiting for a new tanker, so I hope that in the budget next Tuesday – with the timing that we have in that time – we have a new tanker for Warrandyte CFA, which is in a bushfire-prone area and is ill-equipped to be able to fight fires. So I hope that is the time. Talking about time, well, it is also about time that we upgraded the old Andersons Creek Primary School playground, which is in dire need of financial assistance. It is about time we

fixed Ringwood North Primary School's current 200-seat stadium, which is too small for a school of 432 students. It is about time that Chirnside Park Primary School's oval was upgraded. Funding was given to the school in 2020, and they are still waiting four years later for it to be upgraded. It is about time for Donburn Primary School – another fantastic school in my electorate – who in 2017 had a master plan come through and who are still waiting for the next stage of building classrooms. So I am looking forward to seeing that additional funding, because it is about time.

Rarely do you hear something so funny in the chamber. I know that it can get serious in this place, but we heard a very good line earlier from the member for Bayswater, who said, 'Everyone is copying the work of Victoria.' Is that so? Well, they are not copying our work on tourism. Victoria has fallen to third place behind Queensland for tourism. The latest visitor survey from Tourism Research Australia has confirmed that Victorian international tourism spending is at 73 per cent of prepandemic levels, compared to 96 per cent in New South Wales and 94 per cent in Queensland. They are not copying our work when it comes to keeping children safe. Despite New South Wales implementing reforms to jail child sex offenders in 2018, this week – just yesterday – the government rejected the member for Malvern's motion to close the legal loophole allowing prison sentences for historical child sex offenders to be suspended. Would you believe it.

Dylan Wight: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, while I am finding the contribution really amusing, I am not quite sure what the motion from the member from Malvern yesterday has to do with the budget next Tuesday. I would ask you to bring the member back to the motion at hand, as you previously have.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member has not been in here. To be fair, the member for Mordialloc is the only speaker who has actually spoken on the motion. This has been a very wideranging debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It has. If the member could continue on the motion, though, it would make everything easier.

Nicole WERNER: Back to the matter at hand. We are speaking about the budget next week. We are speaking about the debt that Victoria is in, and getting back to what I was saying, they are not copying our work on debt. Despite levying the highest taxes in the nation, Victoria now also has the highest state debt in the country, greater than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. That is something we are looking forward to seeing again on Tuesday – how much more debt we will be in. \$177.8 billion it is projected to be by 2027. That is what Victorians have to look forward to at the timing of the budget next Tuesday. Would you believe it.

They are not copying our work when it comes to the cost of living. Recent figures show that Victorian household disposable income suffered the biggest fall in the country, with Victorians \$1100 worse off than those living in New South Wales.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: If the members for Tarneit and Narracan would like to have a chat, they can do it outside.

Nicole WERNER: They are not copying our work when it comes to youth justice. A young person in detention-based supervision in Victoria costs \$5900 per day, more than double the cost to support a young person in detention in New South Wales. They are not copying our work when it comes to dwelling approvals. Dwelling approvals fell 18.3 per cent in Victoria in July 2023, compared to falls of just 2.6 per cent in South Australia and 4.7 per cent in New South Wales. They are certainly not copying our work when it comes to business. Victoria has 7606 fewer registered businesses, compared to 11,031 more in Queensland and 8147 more in New South Wales. So, yes, thank you to the member for Bayswater – and let the tone of sarcasm be noted for *Hansard* – everyone is copying the work of Victoria!

I close with that. I eagerly anticipate my very first budget as the member for Warrandyte next Tuesday. I eagerly await the timing of all these projects that we are waiting for, the funding that my community is so desperately in need of. I look forward to it immensely.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (11:16): I have to say I am absolutely thrilled to speak in support of this motion. Unlike others, I will try and keep to the motion at hand. I will say it is the second budget for me as the member for Kororoit; I am very proud of that and cannot wait to see what will be on display next Tuesday.

But I do have a little confession: it is not the second budget that I am taking notice of. Like the member for Bentleigh said earlier, budget day is and always has been like Christmas Day for many of us political types. I recall going to a number of budget lock-ups and sitting there eagerly to see what was going to come out of the budget. The budget is one that provides for working people, it is one that provides for working families, it has opportunities for many Victorians, and it is one that I am sure we can all be very proud of.

I am looking forward to this budget as well because it is our Treasurer's 10th budget. This is a man who knows what he is doing, he is in the right position, and it is something that I am excited for. As we know, the Labor Party does deliver on education, we do deliver on public transport and on roads. We deliver for working Victorians, and I am really proud to be part of this budget. I look forward to next Tuesday. As the member for Albert Park said, only five more sleeps, so bring it on.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (11:18): I rise to speak on this motion on budget arrangements, and I might mention my kids later on. Budget day is such an important day next week. It is such an important day in our year. It is important not just for us but for our future, for our kids – for your kids and for my kids. Kids like those at Balcombe Grammar School in Mount Martha in my electorate who are here with us today in Parliament, and my own kids as mentioned before, Yasmin and Edward, who are eight and five. I want the best future for them, as I am sure all of you do for your kids and every Victorian kid.

I explained to the students from Balcombe Grammar School out in Queen's Hall before the importance of this debate that they could see on the little TV screen out there. I explained the importance of budgets. They also got to come into the chamber before to hear the wonderful and fulsome contribution from the member for Gippsland South and to hear his important shopping list as well. I talked with them about the importance of having time next week to talk about what we spend money on, whether it is on schools, on hospitals, on roads and so on, and the importance of having time to talk about what our debt level is and what our taxes are. The timing of the budget is so important, and the time we have to speak on it. The contributions that we make are so important for our future, and how long we get to speak on and scrutinise the budget is important, as I said, not just for us but for everyone.

I know my community wants me to have time to speak, whether it is on matters like the much-needed Mount Eliza secondary school upgrades, the increased land taxes many are facing, which are pushing up house prices and rental prices, or the impacts – like the need to upgrade Forest and Uralla roads and much more. My community wants me to have the time next week to speak about Labor's now over \$120 billion debt, which is projected to grow to over \$170 billion in a few years time. The interest on this debt is enormous. I want to ask the member for Sandringham about this. Member for Sandringham, what is the interest right now? Is it \$10 million of interest per day? Is it higher? Is it \$11 million of interest per day? Higher? Is it \$12 million? What about \$15 million? Is it up to that? Yes.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is neither question time nor a time for the member for Mornington to ask members of his own party questions. Bring him back to the motion, please.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. Through the Chair, please, member for Mornington.

Chris CREWETHER: I will say, Deputy Speaker, it is very important for me to talk about the timing of the budget next week and how much time we have to contribute towards this debate, because it is very important to talk about what we are delivering in Victoria. It is very important to talk about our debt levels and the interest we are paying each day. At \$15 million of interest, that is \$15 million per day of hard-earned taxpayer funds. For example, over two days with these interest payments we could upgrade Mount Eliza Secondary College or many of the schools in my electorate. My community wants me to have time next week to speak about what further cuts or taxes they may be looking at, like cuts to fixing the Mount Martha landslip disaster, which was cut in last year's budget, or like the school taxes that would have impacted parents and students at Balcombe Grammar School, who, as I mentioned, are here with us in Parliament today and who argued against that along with parents, the opposition and I. Fortunately the threshold was increased so they will not be impacted, but these are important matters that we need to have time to speak about next week.

We need sufficient time to speak, to ask questions and to scrutinise the budget. It needs scrutiny because we need to scrutinise things like the \$216 billion white elephant Suburban Rail Loop, which the government are implementing despite their debt levels and despite not even having a business case for this project. But at the same time they are cutting much smaller projects like the Baxter rail project, despite the fact that my electorate has no rail services altogether. That meant \$225 million was scrapped from that project by Labor because of the lack of this state Labor government's commitment. It would have delivered more rail services for the whole peninsula, and as the member for Nepean and I can attest, it is much needed because we on the peninsula have a lack of public transport, with 82 per cent of the people on the peninsula not having access to any form of public transport.

We need time to talk about things like the Mornington police cuts as well, and cuts to other police stations across Victoria where they need more staff and more resources. In my electorate what we have seen is cuts to the reception hours.

We need time to actually ensure that we are not shut down in our debate next Tuesday like we were this Tuesday. That was a shameful exercise that we saw this week by those opposite in shutting down debate, in shutting down motions by leave before the motions even got to be discussed by those moving them. I hope that our debate on next week's budget is not shut down before we get to make a contribution to what are very important matters in our electorate. I felt that what happened on Tuesday was very anti-democratic, but this seems to be the nature of this government. On this motion I do call on the government to enhance democracy, to enhance the ability of everyone in this place to speak about the budget and to enhance the ability to ask questions, to scrutinise the budget and to talk about the important needs not just in our electorates but for Victorians.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (11:24): I too rise to speak on the budget motion going on in here at the moment. As you were saying, it is a tight procedural motion, but let us have a go. On the regional side of things and especially the people down in my patch, the only motion that we seem to get via this budget motion is being bent over by the government, as we actually receive nothing in general from the Treasurer coming forward. There are a few bits and pieces down in the valley, and it is not only in my seat of Morwell; it is right around regional Victoria that we seem to be missing out on money being spent in our area. I have to go home at the end of every sitting week and explain why we have not got our roads being funded, we have not got our schools being funded and we are relentlessly trying to get in contact with ministers and the Treasurer as to why we cannot get some money spent on infrastructure down in our area.

The government seems to have not been forthright. They are not shy of shutting down our timber industry and shutting down our white paper industry, so we would like to see in the upcoming budget some measures that are going to help alleviate the issues of our timber workers and our white paper industry workers also. They have been promised packages which are unacceptable, so we hope the Treasurer stands up for regional Victoria and especially stands up for people in the seat of Morwell so they can have some certainty moving forward.

We need money for our roads. We have got a bridge in Tyers which has been half built. The government, to their credit on this one, built half a bridge that works, but when it floods it still is shut. We need to have some funding at Waterloo Road in Moe to change this thoroughfare for Moe and Newborough, as it travels across railway lines. Also at Breed Street in Traralgon we need our traffic lights put up or the infrastructure there to do that.

CFA shed upgrades – I have heard other regional members and some city members that are on the fringe talking about upgrades for the CFA. We have had Hazelwood CFA, which are coming up in a few years to their 100th year. We have asked the Treasury if they could provide some funds to make certain that their new shed will be built, coming up on their 100th year. Tyers CFA – we have asked again and again since I have been in Parliament. This is my second budget coming up, and it is interesting to hear other members that have been in for up to six. I think the member for Bayswater said that he was in his sixth budget.

Moving forward, seeing we missed out on money coming into the seat of Morwell and into Latrobe Valley, we would hope that there is a lot of money for renewable projects so we can get back up and going with our manufacturing of renewable projects down in Latrobe Valley, which would be great.

On the sporting front we heard the member for Nepean talking about some sporting issues before. Back in 2021 the Traralgon Football Netball Club was devastated by a flood that went through, and we have had relentless letters written to the Treasurer asking for certain funding. We are hoping, because the Traralgon Football Netball Club are without rooms still after the 2021 floods, that there will be some major funding there for the football netball club to move on and rebuild rooms that they can start using again. Similarly, the Churchill Football Netball Club are after funding to make sure that their rooms can be upgraded, because they are not fit for purpose. They have got female footy playing out of there now, and they also need funding for there.

But as we move forward, we wait in anticipation for Tuesday with the budget coming up. I am sure that a lot of people down in the Latrobe Valley will be looking to make sure there is adequate funding for our police down there, because at the moment we have a lot of break-ins with our youth breaking into houses and stealing cars, and also in the last few weeks we have had an uprising of youth carrying machetes and concealed weapons that have been arrested by our police officers to keep us safe. But they get pushed in to front court, and then they are put back out on bail. So we need to make sure there is ample money.

This is not just for the seat of Morwell, where I am from, and regional Victoria; it is for right across Victoria. We need to make sure that we have enough money in the budget to make sure that for these offenders who are causing grief to every single community around the state, practices can be put in place to once and for all make it stop. We need to make sure that we have got the funding there so that we can back our police and then back our judiciary system to make the right calls going forward. I know that is a really positive one. It does not matter what age you are; when you walk down the street where you live you want to be sure that you are safe and feel comfortable in your environment.

It is going to be a big budget. I am not expecting a lot, as the MP down in Morwell, for my region. As I said before, we would really like to get the roads fixed, because at the moment, with the roads in the disrepair they are in, we are having a lot of trouble getting ministers to travel down the road from Melbourne into my region and actually sit down and talk with us. We need to get the roads fixed moving forward and get the Labor ministers of the Allan government to come down and talk to our timber workers, talk to our white paper workers and talk to our workers at the new SEC so they can explain what is going on and how we are going to transition moving forward.

As members of Parliament standing up in this chamber today – we said we only have five sleeps to go until the budget comes up – we are hoping, we have our fingers crossed, that regional Victoria will not once again be forgotten, as it was last year. We will see how we go. We are not expecting a lot from the Treasurer. We wait with bated breath to see how much damage and how much more debt we have.

It is time to stop the Melbourne Big Build and move it into regional Victoria. We need our fair share. We do a lot of heavy lifting around the state in regional Victoria, and all we want is our fair share moving into the budget. As I said, I look forward to sitting through budget day on Tuesday and being able to respond on behalf of my community once we have gone through the facts and figures and seen what we did and what we did not get. On Tuesday we get to see that, Acting Speaker, and I thank you for allowing me to speak today.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:32): I am very pleased to rise today to talk about the budget motion and what the budget will be and how it will unfold for regional Victoria. I agree with the member for Morwell that a lot of the time regional Victoria gets forgotten. We have already seen this government wind back on commitments – no worse than on the Bunyip–Longwarry line duplication, which was promised and not delivered. The worst part is that it was not even funded by the state government, it was funded by the federal government, and they could not even complete that. I took the member for Bulleen down there, and we were rushed off the site by the CFMEU. They did not want us to see anything down there. The fact of the matter is they have broken the promise on the Bunyip line duplication and the Bunyip bridge.

What is even more amazing is the neglect the CFAs have had in regional Victoria. Look at the Nar Nar Goon CFA, which was built in 1939. Ironically, the guy that ran against me, Justin Seddon, for Labor was the captain of the Nar Nar Goon fire station, and he still could not get a commitment out of the government to build a new fire station. This is important for regional Victoria because we need our CFAs to protect our communities. No wonder Justin Seddon put a Liberal cap on and decided to start handing out for the Liberal Party. What an absolute disgrace.

But our biggest concern in my area is the West Gippsland Hospital. The Liberal–National coalition have backed this ever since it was put forward by the Department of Health. They backed a new hospital in West Gippsland, and the member for Bulleen was there – I was with him – when we announced it in 2022. The Labor announcement was pretty much on the back of a Weeties packet in someone's backyard in Warragul. Will they continue with it, and will they take all the services along with it? This is the problem my community is going to have. We firmly believe that the government will wind back on the services for the West Gippsland Hospital and they will not deliver everything that was promised. This community has been waiting for this hospital for way, way too long.

Since I was elected to this Parliament we have had 10 new taxes – 10 new taxes since I was elected in 2023. The land tax bills people are paying now are killing them. They have gone up 100, 200, 300, 500 per cent in a lot of cases. In my electorate a local constituent's land tax bill went from \$129,000 to \$532,000 – over half a million dollars in land tax. Where do you think that is going to end up at the end of the day? It will end up with the people that purchase the properties. That is what is going to happen. I said it in my maiden speech: every time you create another tax or charge it will get passed down the line. It will get passed down the line again when this budget comes in and we see more taxes. Cost of living in this state is well out of control, and people are paying the price for Labor's incompetence.

Now to the SRL – the Suburban Rail Loop – which I believe is sacrificing regional lives. If I had 1 per cent of that budget in Narracan – just 1 per cent or \$2.16 billion – I could build a hospital, I could fix everything else in my electorate and I could give you \$1 billion back. That is the effect that this project will have on regional Victoria. Drouin Secondary College was promised an \$11.7 million upgrade that has now been delayed. Every time something goes pear-shaped with this government it hits regional Victoria, and regional Victorians are bearing the brunt of this government's incompetence. It happens to us all the time. It has happened to my hospital, it has happened to the Longwarry–Bunyip road duplication and it has happened to Drouin Secondary College. Why don't we sacrifice Melbourne for a change? But no, we will not. Then we come to health and the amalgamations that are going to occur with the hospitals – the amalgamations that again are going to take the local community out of their local hospitals. It is an absolute disgrace.

I look forward to the next budget. I do not think it is going to be kind to regional Victoria. I think regional Victoria is going to get screwed over again by this government, but I will have to wait and see.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (11:37): I move:

That the question be now put.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, is the government putting a gag motion on its own motion on a debate that it has not been able to carry?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. Given the length of the debate, I accept the question.

Assembly divided on Sonya Kilkenny's motion:

Ayes (50): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Sonya Kilkenny's motion agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Documents

University of Divinity

Report 2023

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (11:44): I move:

That the University of Divinity report 2023 be tabled.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Apology for past care leavers

Debate resumed on motion of Natalie Hutchins:

That this house takes note of the parliamentary apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (11:45): I continue where I left off last sitting week in this place in speaking to the Premier's apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse or neglect as children in institutional care, which was delivered in this place on Thursday 8 February.

Last time I spoke about how as I sat in the chamber that day when the apology was being delivered I looked over to the public gallery and I was awestruck by the presence of so many survivors, along

with their loved ones and the carers who joined us. One of the things that moved me the most was the number of disabled people and their carers who were in the gallery. It moved me because of my own uncle Ken. As I have said before, Uncle Ken has lived with us for his entire life. He was born with a disability. Despite being told by his doctor when he was in his 30s that he could not possibly live past the age of 40, Uncle Ken turned 71 in March, and he has not gone anywhere. I am so blessed to have my Uncle Ken in my life and in our family's lives, because he has taught me to always see the person and not the disability. He has lived his life his way, and we are all so very proud of him. He is the gentlest of souls, and while we gave him a home, it was he who was always healing us.

After hearing the apology and the stories of the survivors of this institutional abuse, I thought of what might have happened to my Uncle Ken had he been born into a different world; what might have happened to him had he been born into a world where people with a disability were regarded as nothing more than a burden; what might have happened to him had he been born into a world where the state arrogated to itself the power to remove children with the stroke of a pen, to remove them from their families which it regarded to be socially inferior through no fault of their own, no matter how much we loved or cared for him; what might have happened to him in a world where his carers were not there to care for him at all but policed, mistreated, neglected, abused, harmed and dehumanised him in the most unspeakable ways. Worst of all, if my Uncle Ken had been snatched up and thrown into this hellish world without ever knowing love, like so many thousands of innocent children were, would his life have lasted through childhood at all? The thought sends a shiver down my spine. As the Premier said:

Unmarried couples, single mums and dads, those who had the misfortune of just being poor or sick – the state set its sights on the most vulnerable in our community, making judgements with the stroke of a pen that would change the course of someone's life forever. When you listen to their stories it is that casual indifference, that careless cruelty that is often the hardest to bear – the arrogance and incompetence of officials who thought they knew better.

I welcome the Allan Labor government's announcement that it is working to roll out a redress scheme later this year, which will be co-designed with organisations representing victim-survivors. I also welcome the advance payments that will start to be made to victim-survivors in the meantime before the broader scheme is ready, because there can be nothing resembling justice for these survivors without compensation.

I want to thank and commend the victim-survivors organisations that made this historic apology and redress possible, including the Care Leavers Australasia Network, CLAN; Open Place; Alliance for Forgotten Australians; Child Migrants Trust; Connecting Home and more. As the Premier said:

... these brave men and women have been resisting their whole lives ... Like wildflowers growing through a crack in the cement, they rose up. They rebelled, they fooled adults and sometimes they escaped.

Without these remarkable people's relentless campaigns to make their truth known, we politicians never would have known and never would have acted. There are far too many individuals to name, but I will single out the incredible Leonie Sheedy from CLAN. Leonie said that this history needs to be taught in schools in Victoria, and I firmly believe that it does. It should never be forgotten.

Finally, let me say that we cannot allow these institutions to continue to fail people today, because if we do, our apology will simply be in vain. If there are instances in our community where children must be removed from their surrounds for their own wellbeing, we must have the most stringent oversights in place to ensure that they do not suffer any institutional abuse or neglect. And families suffering social disadvantage through no fault of their own must never be targeted and have their children removed from them. The truth is that there are too many children living in out-of-home care, away from their families, in Victoria, and this has to change, because saying sorry means that we will never do it again. Once again, I acknowledge the victim-survivors and those who are tragically no longer with us. I commit myself to a loving and beautiful world, worthy of all of our humanity.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (11:50): I too would like to add my voice to the Victorian parliamentary apology to children who were supposed to be cared for by the state, children that were often forcibly removed from their families to supposedly be cared for better in a children's home. A children's home – it sounds like a nice place, a nurturing place, but in fact they were houses of horror, often brutal, humiliating, cruel and vicious, stifling all aspiration, hope and development.

The apology given by Premier Jacinta Allan on behalf of all members of the Victorian Labor government acknowledged and apologised to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care. This abuse included criminal abuse, but also the children were often denied basic rights such as the right to an education, to literacy and numeracy. A resident of Thomastown who has been fighting for justice for those in state care for many years tells me he was denied an education at school and as a result he was denied the opportunity to learn to read and write. While the adults in charge of his life set him on a course of poverty and low-paid work, if any at all, there was a brighter side. He found an apprenticeship in the metal trades, and the trades teacher allowed him to do the test to qualify in his trade verbally – one act of kindness that in Alf's words changed the course of his life, allowing him to buy a house and provide well for his family. That teacher obviously saw the potential in Alf.

While our apology refers to historical abuse, we all know that the effect of such abuse is not historical. The effects are lifelong and, in many cases, cut lives short. I want to acknowledge the leaders that I know of that have driven the fight for justice and acknowledgement from government – Leonie Sheedy from the Care Leavers Australasia Network and, closer to home, Alf and Bev Stirling, residents of the Thomastown electorate, who have fought for their rights and the rights of all children to be safe. I know there have been many, many others who have worked and fought for justice, but these are the individuals that I know most.

My grandmother was in an orphanage for a short time. Her parents were migrants and had no childcare backup. Her mother was gravely ill in hospital, and her father had no choice but to put her, her brother and her sister in care, because he needed to keep his job. Of course there was no carers leave in those days. She never spoke of it, and we can only wonder about her experience.

The lack of proper acknowledgement and an apology to children in state care by the Victorian government has been a missing piece in the tragedy of institutional abuse of children, and I am proud to be part of the government that has done it now. In 2011 the then state Liberal government referred a reference to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into the handling of child abuse by religious and other non-government organisations, and I commend the Baillieu Liberal government for its courage at the time. Frank Maguire and I, as newly elected MPs, were appointed to this committee prior to the reference, and we were the two opposition members on it. The committee received many submissions, both in writing and in person, and heard the most harrowing personal accounts of crimes against children, and it was in these hearings that it became obvious to us that the reference to religious and non-government institutions was too narrow and denied justice to those in state care. The terms of reference prevented proper scrutiny of the role of the state that in effect gave children to religious and non-government institutions.

The Victorian government also ran its own institutions, such as Turana, and it was state institutions such as the police and other agencies that often dismissed reports made by children, when they were children as well as when they were adults. The inquiry and the report, *Betrayal of Trust*, found that, for example:

There appears to have been either limited or no State monitoring of these ... places.

The Committee was informed of an example of a child being physically assaulted by a police officer when apprehended ...

having run away from care. The child had told the police officer of the abuse, resulting in a beating, and then they were returned to the institution.

This was one such example from the CLAN submission, and we also received submissions and copies of correspondence that had been sent to members of Parliament over the years telling them of the abuse, and it was ignored and presumably not believed. As a member of the Victorian Allan Labor government, I am deeply sorry and so very, very angry. During the *Betrayal of Trust* inquiry we heard many examples of individuals telling people in authority – elected representatives, police, church leaders and department representatives – about what was happening and what had happened, and it seems at the time of the offending not one adult bothered to inquire, investigate or check. This is truly disturbing. I hope this apology, unanimously endorsed across the Victorian Parliament, means that we will all be vigilant and never dismiss allegations made because they are too outlandish, impossible or challenging.

Before I finish, I would like to quote from the *Betrayal of Trust* report the experience again of a resident who was at the Bayswater Boys Home, run by the Salvation Army:

Whilst in care at both facilities [operated by the Bayswater Boys Home], I was abused mentally, sexually and physically by the staff. I was not privy to the names of the staff as I was only ordered to refer to them as BOSS. We were given food that was not –

fit for animals to eat –

... porridge with [weevils], mouldy bread ... Floggings and beating on a daily basis, scars on my body bear the horrific memories. At night I would hear screams and crying, hoping that my door would not be opened, that that night I would not be ... abused. Although, I was no exception, I was ... abused many times.

Today I sleep with an axe and knife under my bed. My family has suffered by side effect behaviour from the abuse.

Following the tabling of the *Betrayal of Trust* and the subsequent election of a state Labor government in 2014, it became our responsibility to implement the recommendations of the *Betrayal of Trust* report. Victoria has introduced some of the most progressive reform on prevention in the country, the child safe legislative reform and grooming offences, as an example. I hope that this apology has some meaning to those children unforgivably let down by the state, and we know that an apology is not the end of it. The heartbreaking truth remains that institutional abuse and its impacts on individuals, families and generations will always be unfinished business.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (11:57): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Tim Pallas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Brad Rowswell'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 commits to:

- (1) further consultation on the proposed CIPT rate including the cost neutrality of the proposed reforms and how the reforms will affect owners of regional and non-regional commercial and industrial properties;

- (2) providing investors with certainty and confidence against any potential future tax increases; and
- (3) making public the modelling assumptions underpinning the \$50 billion economic uplift anticipated from this reform scheme and the rationale for the risk margin component of the proposed 10-year transitional government loan, including any future changes made to the risk margin component of the loan rate'.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (11:58): I would like to begin just by thanking the member for Thomastown for her thoughtful and moving contribution to the take-note motion on abuse and neglect in residential care.

It is a pleasure to get back on my feet for another 8 minutes and 8 seconds to speak on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. When we adjourned yesterday we were discussing the benefits of that bill, and I would like to briefly recap that discussion. Of course one very obvious benefit is the more stable revenue that the state government will see; we will not see the variance that we saw through transaction volume under the current arrangements. Another obvious example is the greater mobility that we will see for businesses – they will be able to move and expand to better locations – and there will be I think an important flow-on effect there for congestion and for emissions.

And then finally there is the important impact on land banking and underutilisation of commercial and industrial land. I would like to very much echo the comments in that respect by the member for Footscray. She is spearheading I think a very important conversation about the land banking of commercial land. She talks about the Forges site and the old Little Saigon market in Footscray. We certainly have very similar sites in Preston and Reservoir. I know when we doorknock around High Street people often say to us in the context of the Preston Market debate, 'Why would you knock down a building that is used by thousands of people a week to build a new residential apartment building when you could instead knock down one of the dozens of unused commercial buildings on High Street that are currently simply serving as homes for rats and pigeons?' And I do think they have a valid point. I am sure most of us here could name sites in our electorates that are frustratingly underused. I might take the chance to add that the Calvary care site at 800 Plenty Road, the old McDonald's site – which they have finally removed the rubbish from – still sits unused, in stark contrast I should say to this Labor government's building of a very nice substation next door.

I also want to touch on the benefits of applying this reform to commercial and industrial property only, which I think is the real ingenuity of this bill, if I could put it that way, and perhaps has been underexplored in the debate so far. The commercial and industrial sector is where you get the most uplift from these sorts of reforms, certainly on a per-property basis, but it is also I think the sector with the least downside risk. One of the well-known issues with removing stamp duty and replacing it with a land tax for residential property is that there are some people who own their own home but have very little in the way of cash flow, most notably pensioners, and I think there are very genuine concerns for how that sort of reform might affect those people. I think inevitably there will be some for whom it would be difficult.

It is a different proposition for commercial property owners. The member for Ovens Valley tried to paint a picture of negative impacts for those whose business is effectively their superannuation, but his contribution was not accurate – it was scaremongering. Those people, if they do own commercial property as part of their superannuation, will of course need to sell that property in order to realise that money. They would face stamp duty as it currently stands. The switch from stamp duty to land tax makes no significant difference to their superannuation beyond the normal fluctuations that we all see in our superannuation. I thought the member for Ovens Valley was very much overstating the case. Finally, I think a standout reason for applying this reform to commercial and industrial property in particular is that it is well supported by that sector. I think the member for Bentleigh in the contribution yesterday went through the strong support. I think it is true to say that that strong support does not yet exist for primary producers or for the residential sector. There is more work to do there, and I do think some of the advocates in that area have perhaps overlooked some of the legitimate counterarguments.

I think people do have a revealed preference for choosing the incidence of a large tax like stamp duty or land tax, and they do that under the current system; they can sort of choose when they pay a stamp duty. There are also some of the political risks that we see with council rates, because when you have a broad-based land tax it does tend to be the subject of populist campaigns. I think most importantly there are still remaining valid equity concerns about residential stamp duty. I noticed the member for Prahran – the Greens are not here at the moment – indicated that the Greens supported a residential land tax. I do think it is really important to note that the distributional effects of such a policy have not been fully explored. We do not have the evidence base we need, and I would encourage the Greens to seek that before they make claims that land tax would benefit young people, among other claims that the member for Prahran made.

I would like to deal if I can with the reasoned amendment by the member for Sandringham, who is not here, but in essence the member for Sandringham's reasoned amendment calls for more consultation, which of course is the reasoned amendment you propose when you do not really have a reasoned amendment. In fact I could quote the member for Gippsland South, who much more accurately pointed out that this announcement was made 12 months ago. There has also been a parliamentary inquiry into the topic since then. I do think that constitutes a very significant amount of public consultation. I do note further for the member for Sandringham's benefit that we have 10 years until the reforms kick in fully. There is a little bit of time for fine-tuning should that prove necessary.

Then with respect to the member's substantial amendments, there is the 0.8 per cent versus 1 per cent difference that the member for Sandringham has proposed. I am not sure what particular insight into the state of the Victorian economy in 2034 the member for Sandringham has to propose that change, but I suggest that it possibly reflects some of the risk of populist campaigning that I referred to earlier. I am not sure that difference is particularly substantial. The member proposes that clause 57 change with respect to transparency about risk premia. With the fullest respect, I do not think anyone who actually understands risk premia would think that proposal was especially substantial. And then finally there is the member's proposal around the regional 0.4 per cent rate, the differential rate, for regional commercial and industrial property.

I do think it is important here to delineate between business owners in the regions and the people that own the property, which outside of primary production are often different people. The Treasurer has been a huge supporter of concessions for regional business owners, notably on payroll tax and also on stamp duty, and I suspect as we get closer to 2034 it will become clear that this reform supports regional businesses in the form that we see it today.

A further and final reason for restricting this reform to industrial and commercial property is the fact that existing stamp duty arrangements, as we know, for that sector are already very complex. There were complaints from the opposition earlier that this bill is complex, but I am not sure they have tried reading the way that stamp duty is applied to real estate investment trusts and other complex commercial transactions. I think the reforms we have in front of us will be an improvement in that respect.

It is a good reform, it is a groundbreaking reform, but also, very much in line with the way the Treasurer has approached his entire career, it is a well-judged and incremental reform. I thank the Treasurer and his team. I thank Chris Barrett at the Department of Treasury and Finance. I understand Chris Mouratidis has been heavily involved, and I thank Chris, who I know well, for his involvement as well. It is a good bill, and I commend it to the house.

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (12:06): I rise today to speak on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax – that is, the CIPT – Reform Bill 2024, a bill of significance which removes commercial stamp duty on dealings in relation to commercial and industrial land and introduces in its place a commercial and industrial property tax chargeable annually. This is all in an effort to try to stimulate economic growth – which I note has been hindered by those opposite – and productivity by removing a significant barrier for businesses seeking to invest, expand or relocate their operations.

It is said that the abolition of commercial stamp duty will generate \$50 billion in cumulative net present value over the next 40 years, hopefully resulting in a greater quantum of commercial property transactions. Yet those in the industrial sector remain cautiously optimistic about the introduction of the annualised tax, and this bill is yet to instil a greater degree of confidence in the commercial property market. Total returns for industrial property in Victoria are now very close to zero for investors due to a sharp fall in valuations, ultimately leading to negative growth since early 2023. Indeed the commercial property market has been in a slump for a while. While the removal of commercial stamp duty is generally said to be supported by leading economic, business and property industry groups, many industry experts believe that the government should be doing more. While the reduction in up-front cost is welcomed, there is still great concern out there that it will just be replaced with an annual cost that could quickly spiral out of control as the base taxable value rises in coming years.

On this point, the government are not proposing to index this rate to protect it from market increases over time. There are also no assurances to protect business owners from further tax increases in the future. I mean, do Victorians really trust the Allan Labor government to just not increase this base rate over time? I think if we look at this government's track record when it comes to taxation and increased taxation, as we have seen with land tax increases, the schools tax and many other taxes, commercial property investors should be very, very worried. When asked about this uncertainty in the commercial property market, the government overall did not have much to say and acknowledged that it is difficult to anticipate the market impacts of their reforms. While they expect the policy will increase transactions over time, this is expected to occur gradually and will likely pick up after the final stamp duty liability is paid on properties.

Going into a bit more detail, let us have a look at some of the difficulties associated with this bill. Firstly, we have the sneaky removal of the stamp duty concession for commercial and industrial properties purchased in regional Victoria. The proposed CIPT rate removes regional stamp duty concessions by stealth, imposing an ongoing 1 per cent tax on unimproved land for all properties. Already businesses in regional Victoria are hanging on by a thread, with interest rates, insurance premiums, hikes in power costs, tax increases on liquor licences and more making the cost of doing business very difficult, if not impossible. The government need to be doing everything that they can to incentivise investment and interest in businesses and industry in regional Victoria, and indeed on the Mornington Peninsula, which is regional, as the member for Nepean will attest to, but is classed for some reason by this state government as metropolitan. But this government do need to do more because they need to incentivise that investment and interest in businesses and industry in regional Victoria, not to sneakily remove what they welcomed only a few years ago as an incentive for investors to look at opportunities outside of Melbourne.

Secondly, the CIPT rate is proposed to be set at 1 per cent of unimproved land value. The government has not thus far provided any rationale for why this rate was chosen above a lower rate. As mentioned, for long-term owners of commercial and industrial property this tax will impose a much higher impost over time than otherwise would have been paid through stamp duty. In the end whether or not the taxpaying investor actually benefits from this change depends on the capital improved value of the property itself, the unimproved value of the land and how long the property is held. Say you have a \$10 million property with an unimproved land value. The duty saving is \$630,000, while the additional land tax value is \$50,000 a year. If you keep the land for less than 12 years you end up paying less overall, as you have saved more in taxes than what you paid in yearly land tax. However, if you keep the land for 13 years or more the government ends up getting more money from you. At that point the amount you have saved in taxes is less than what you have paid in land tax. One of the golden rules of property investors is to buy and hold. Why is the government ultimately introducing measures that would make it cheaper for investors to sell early than to hold on for as long as they can? That is not an incentive at all.

On another note, in the first phase of the government's proposed reform there is the risk of double taxation for purchasers of commercial property who enter into a contract of sale on or after 1 July this

year. Under this reform scheme the first purchaser will be obliged to pay the final stamp duty liability. If this same purchaser holds onto the property for at least 10 years, they will effectively be hit twice, paying CIPT from the 11th year and for every subsequent year of ownership. While the legislation prohibits a landlord from passing on CIPT to tenants, commercial tenants are rightly concerned that the annual 1 per cent CIPT will be passed on to them through increased rents, as has been the case with the government's recent increase to land tax, which ultimately is hitting renters. Furthermore, in the example above that we have used, the landowner would pay a normal land tax of \$84,650 and now an additional \$50,000 in land tax for a total of \$134,650. This is a substantial eat into the rental yield received from the property.

While the focus of this bill is to remove commercial stamp duty on dealings in relation to commercial industrial land, I would like to touch on what I believe would be a welcome move, to abolish stamp duty for residential property, as many constituents speak to me about the challenge they face to buy a home. Like with payroll tax, stamp duty is an unfair and inefficient tax. As I raised in my maiden speech, it makes it harder for particularly young people and others buying a first home to get into the market in the first place. It also means that young people in particular are buying much bigger properties than they need to start with, because they do not want to be paying stamp duty multiple times. That means they are getting into more debt and are paying more interest with bigger mortgages. It also reduces transfers of properties, which ultimately pushes up house prices and makes it harder for everyone to get into the market.

With the median house price in Melbourne for all dwellings being \$783,261, you can expect to pay a whopping \$42,000 at a minimum just in stamp duty. By the time you factor in other costs like conveyancing, bank charges, lenders mortgage insurance and more, you can expect that whopping \$42,000 to hit something like the \$55,000 mark at minimum. Then you have your deposit, which will be as low as \$39,000 for 5 per cent but most likely will sit at over \$156,000 for a 20 per cent deposit, particularly for those who are trying to avoid lenders mortgage insurance. When you consider that the national average in savings is around \$36,000 and for young first home buyers sits somewhere between \$5000 and \$7000, one must ask the question: how is anyone ever going to be able to afford a house? Abolishing stamp duty for residential properties has the potential to be a significant policy intervention to boost the housing market, address affordability challenges and facilitate home ownership for young people.

I will note, as the member for Nepean noted the other day as well, with concerns about getting into the housing market we have seen in the Mornington Peninsula shire a proposal to introduce a development contribution levy of at least 3.3 per cent on new builds. If you are a mum and dad with a vacant piece of land and you want to build a new home, it is going to make it even harder and even more expensive for you to get into that market and to build that home. This is something that I am opposing, it is something that the member for Nepean is opposing and it is something that the member for Flinders in the federal Parliament is opposing as well because we cannot keep on adding costs to those who are trying to enter the market and to build new homes. We need to be reducing costs and increasing the supply of houses. If we introduce taxes like this or levies, it will actually mean that we have less housing supply in the market, which will ultimately push up house prices and push up rentals.

Lastly I note, going back to this bill, that the coalition will not be opposing this bill, as in principle removing stamp duty is a step in the right direction towards improving confidence and investment in Victoria's commercial property market. However, there are several issues with the government's proposed reforms which warrant textual amendments and a reasoned amendment, as we are doing, so I support the proposed amendments brought forth by the member for Sandringham, which amongst a few other things, call upon the government to consider the impacts of the CIPT rate on metropolitan and regional areas and propose a lower rate of CIPT for commercial industrial properties at 0.8 per cent and a lower rate of CIPT for regional Victorian properties at 0.4 per cent.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:16): I too am pleased to rise to contribute to the debate today in support of the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. The reason I am so

pleased to do it is because this legislation provides a sensible and comprehensive approach to transitioning over time to an annual commercial and industrial property tax as a replacement for stamp duty currently levied on commercial property sales across Victoria, and I am pleased that the opposition are supporting it. It is great to follow on from the member for Preston, who made a very, very solid contribution, and he has addressed a number of views about the member for Sandringham's proposed amendments to this bill. I just have to say that I concur with the member for Preston, and what he said about those amendments is exactly what I think.

I am going to get on with talking about the bill that we are introducing and why we think this is so important and beneficial to Victorian businesses, Victorian jobs and all Victorians. First and foremost, I would like to thank the Treasurer and his office as well as the Treasury for the work they have done in bringing this bill to the house. This is a landmark reform, and that is what this government is known for, landmark reforms. This is another one that we are very proud to be putting to the Parliament today, and it will bring in billions of dollars of economic benefit to Victorians and Victorian businesses. I really want to acknowledge and recognise all the efforts of those involved, because landmark reforms are so important to us who believe that Victoria needs to keep moving forward and be a reforming state as we are a reforming government.

In terms of thinking about the context and the consequences of this bill that is before the house, under the current arrangements stamp duty, officially known as land transfer duty, is an up-front cost for acquiring a commercial property in Victoria. The lump sum in effect discourages industrial investment and growth, thereby hindering development and employment opportunities more broadly, which is why we are proposing that we transition to a fairer annual system that will prove beneficial for Victorians. I was really interested to learn that there are over a quarter of a million commercial and industrial properties in the state of Victoria, and the associated stamp duty contributes to around 15 to 20 per cent of land transfer duty revenue. Reforming this system is significant, and mitigating the short-term budget impact requires a gradual approach, with this bill proposing a transition period of 10 years at a minimum. This approach will result in up to \$50 billion in cumulative economic growth in net present value terms, yet it will also be broadly revenue neutral in the long term, which is something that everyone will be very pleased about. Acting Speaker Farnham, I am sure you are pleased about that revenue-neutral aspect of this great reform.

How are we going to achieve this? What the legislation under consideration today proposes is a new act. Often in this place we are just amending an act. This is a brand new act.

A member interjected.

Juliana ADDISON: It is exciting – a brand new act, a brand new law, not a change. The Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024 is defined as a taxation law to be administered by the State Revenue Office under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and is slated to commence this year from 1 July. I would like to give a shout-out to the State Revenue Office workforce, many of whom are based in my electorate at our beautiful GovHub building. I visited recently with Minister Williams, the Minister for Government Services. Some of the parents whose kids my kids go to school with work at the SRO. A couple of girls I went to school with also work at the State Revenue Office. It is a really great example of decentralisation and supporting jobs in the region. The State Revenue Office does a great job and creates really well paid, good jobs in the heart of my community, which is what this government is about – supporting regional Victorians.

The bill that is before us proposes reforms to the taxation of commercial and industrial property as defined by the Australian valuation property classification codes. I knew nothing about these codes before this, but now I am across them. A range of different codes are included. Commercially classified properties have codes between 200 and 299, industrial properties have codes from 300 to 399, extractive industries have allocated codes from 400 to 499 and industrial infrastructure and utilities have codes between 600 and 699. Interestingly, these codes are already in use for council rates and other uses. These codes are going to be part of it.

Another thing that I was interested to learn is that certain student accommodation locations, including those run as private ventures and not by a university or tertiary college itself, will be subject to these reforms. Mixed-use properties on one title are eligible if they are either solely or primarily commercial or industrial. I am learning stuff every day that I am this place, Acting Speaker Farnham, as I am sure you are.

Let us talk about what we are going to do as we begin this important landmark reform. While these reforms will begin from the middle of this year, in 2024, the commercial and industrial property tax itself will not begin for another decade – it will be interesting to see how many of us are still here in 10 years time – under a proposed gradual transition. This 10-year period commences when a property is considered to have entered the reform. There are a few criteria for this, and I want to make sure we understand what the criteria are – a contract entered into on or after 1 July 2024 with at least 50 per cent of non-exempt property transacting and with that property having a qualifying commercial or industrial use at the time of settlement. I hope it is really clear to everyone what that is. If these criteria are met, the property is liable for one final instance of stamp duty and then 10 years afterwards becomes liable for the annual commercial and industrial property tax.

What this bill also does is introduce transition loans to finance the final stamp duty payment as an option – and I really want to stress that it is an option – for eligible Australian citizens, residents and businesses seeking an alternative to the lump sum payment. These transition loans will help Victorian businesses to free up capital for investing in and growing their businesses, including creating jobs for Victoria. As the daughter of a small business man, I know how important that freeing up of capital is for people running small businesses. Small businesses are very much the heart of Ballarat; they are the drivers of my local economy. I know that going forward this will be an option for a number of small businesses to really help them kickstart their ventures.

Of course it is important that we have accountability measures with these loans, so these loans will be provided according to a strict assessment criteria by the Treasury Corporation of Victoria and repaid with interest across 10 annual payments so they are fully repaid prior to the property tax commencing. But – another important point – if the property is sold during this time, because 10 years is a long time, then the borrower must repay any remaining balance prior to settlement as the debt cannot transfer with the property. I guess it is just like when you sell a house, you need to pay off the mortgage and settle all of that – all that needs to be acquitted – before the transaction can go through.

I am running out of time on this interesting bill. There was so much that I wanted to talk about, but I am going to quickly summarise some of the other important parts of this reform, including providing some additional clarification concerning various aspects of these reforms. For example, a qualifying transaction for entering the reform can be a sale but it can also be the subdivision of a property already entered into the reform or a consolidation of multiple properties with over 50 per cent already entered. In these situations the resulting property would inherit the entry date of the parent properties rather than beginning a new 10-year date.

There is so much to talk about, but I want to say that a number of other acts will be amended, including the Duties Act 2000; the Taxation Administration Act 1997; the Treasury Corporation of Victoria Act 1992; the Heritage Act 2017; the Retail Leases Act 2003, which importantly clarifies that property tax cannot be passed on to the retail tenant; as well as the Property Law Act 1958 and the Sale of Land Act 1962. In closing, I welcome the introduction of the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (12:26): I rise to stand and make a contribution on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. The bill before the house follows the announcement of the new tax in last year's Victorian state budget, handed down in May, where the government announced that land transfer stamp duty on commercial and industrial properties will be abolished and instead replaced with a new tax.

While we fully support the removal of stamp duty from commercial and industrial transactions on this side of the house, we have concerns regarding the government's proposed reform scheme. The bill seeks to reform the taxation of commercial and industrial property as well as amend the Duties Act 2000 and the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Treasury Corporation of Victoria Act 1992 and other acts. From 1 July this year commercial and industrial properties will transition to this new system that the bill establishes and creates as they are sold, with an annual property tax to be payable from 10 years after the transaction. However, for commercial or industrial property purchased before 1 July this year, the tax reform will not apply. In addition, through the bill, properties that are used for residential purposes, primary production, community services, sport or heritage and cultural purposes, as coded primarily by the valuer-general, will also not apply.

The new commercial and industrial property tax will be 1 per cent of the property site value, but 50 per cent of the property will be the interest in the land that is acquired with a positive duty liability and has a qualifying commercial or industrial use at the end of settlement. The tax replaces stamp duty and is separate from land tax, which will continue to apply. The bill and reform do not make any changes to land tax.

While the legislation prohibits a landlord from passing on the commercial and industrial property tax to the tenants, commercial tenants are rightly concerned that the annual 1 per cent CIPT will be passed on to them through increased rents, as has been the case with the government's recent increases to land tax from 1 January this year. We expect there will be a similar outcry from businesses to what we are experiencing from Labor's increase to the land tax base by lowering the tax threshold from \$300,000 to \$50,000 while slapping an additional flat tax of up to \$975 on Victorian households. We are seeing the significant financial detrimental impact this is having, with many selling their properties due to increased land tax costs making the property no longer a viable financial investment, with rental increases passed on to the tenant. The Treasurer himself stated that his own land tax hike will cost the average Victorian household an additional \$1300 every year.

These changes will punish and divide house owners and renters across the state already in a cost-of-living crisis, which the government does not have a plan to tackle. This tax increase will lead to further pressures on households, increase the costs of running a business and increase rents, impacting some of the state's most vulnerable. This comes at a time when Victorians can least afford it. This is yet another example of the Allan Labor government punishing Victorians for Labor's own financial mismanagement. The new commercial and industrial property tax will be based on land ownership as at 31 December following the 10th anniversary of the first transaction of the property after 1 July 2024. For the long-term owners of commercial and industrial property, this tax will impose a much higher tax impost over time than otherwise would have been paid through stamp duty. Commercial properties in Victoria are typically held for at least between 14 and 15 years, with this trend likely to continue, and Victorian investors and businesses will end up paying more.

Under the proposed reforms purchasers of commercial and industrial property paying the final stamp duty liability may elect to have a 10-year transition government loan. This loan will consist of two components – the base loan rate and a risk margin rate – which can be amended annually by the Treasurer. Those who elect to take on the 10-year government loan may be subjected to increased interest rates over the 10-year loan period, with no justification needed. This compromises certainty and confidence for investors and Victorian businesses. In the proposed amendments put forward we call for increased transparency and call on the Treasurer to annually publish the reasons for the risk margin component of a loan.

The bill also incorporates 'qualifying use'. A property is considered to have a qualifying commercial or industrial use if it meets one of the conditions at the settlement date of a property transaction, and in addition, if the property is allocated an Australian valuation property classification code that represents commercial, industrial, extractive industries or infrastructure and utilities land.

It is also important to note the recent inquiry that the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee conducted into land transfer duty fees. As in the minority report handed down by the Liberals and Nationals, since coming to power Labor has increased taxes on homes and land supply; in addition, Labor has failed to provide an adequate supply of new land, especially in regional Victoria. Property prices have increased significantly, which is leaving many Victorians feeling the pinch. The government's stamp duty tax in 2014 saw an increase from \$4.938 billion to \$10.194 billion in 2021–22, which has seen the government fail to index stamp duty across the state – not just in metropolitan Melbourne but also in regional Victoria.

Since coming to power in 2014 Labor has increased taxes on homes and land supply, which is having a significant financial impact. The main report of the committee shows there has been increased tax by Labor in terms of stamp duty, land tax and increased development taxes. But it should also not be forgotten by Victorians that Labor has introduced 53 new or increased taxes since being in power. In their testimony provided to the committee the Urban Development Institute of Australia as well as the property council pointed to the high contribution of government taxes to the cost of homes and land. The failure of the Labor government to provide an adequate supply of new land, especially in regional Victoria, has resulted in significant increases in property prices for Victorians.

The proposed legislation will apply to property transactions with a contract and settlement date on or after 1 July this year. For these properties stamp duty will be paid one final time on the property when it is transacted, and the new tax will be payable 10 years after the final stamp duty payment, regardless of whether the property has transacted again. If the property is sold and transacted again, stamp duty will not apply if the property continues to be used as a commercial or industry property.

As previously mentioned, there is an option the government is providing to purchasers of commercial or industrial properties – a government-facilitated transition loan – as an alternative to self-financing the up-front stamp duty amount. However, the transitional loan will only be available to applicants that are eligible, which include Australian citizens, permanent residents or Australian businesses, the first purchaser of a commercial or industrial property when settlement occurs for contracts entered into on or after 1 July this year, or when purchasing property up to a maximum purchase price of \$30 million and approved for finance by an authorised deposit-taking institution or other approved lender for the subject of property.

The bill briefing provided by the government and the department said the revenue flow from the new tax itself will flow on each year. As such, tax will start as a trickle due to the uncertainty around forecasting and the 1 per cent tax rate to come as a neutral revenue flow in 2050. Industries have expressed concerns for the short period of implementation time allocated by the government. If this legislation is passed by Parliament in the first few weeks of May, with reforms to be enforced from 1 July 2024, it will give less than two months to get across the detail of a highly complex set of reforms to the commercial property market. This short implementation time, paired with the complexity of the proposed reforms, creates a prime environment for mistakes.

My electorate is home to a diverse range of successful and proud commercial and industrial businesses, and we seek to attract future investment and opportunities for the region. A stamp duty concession is currently available for commercial and industrial properties purchased in regional Victoria. The government's proposed CIPT rate proposes to remove regional stamp duty concessions by stealth, imposing an ongoing 1 per cent tax on unimproved land for all properties. Regional Victorians are rightly concerned that the proposal will erode existing incentives to invest in regional Victoria. We should be encouraging businesses in regional Victoria to expand and set up their business platform in the best location possible in order to invest in buildings and infrastructure to cater for and service the community and the region more broadly.

The legislation proposes to set up CIPT to a flat 1 per cent of unimproved land value. The government are not proposing to index this rate to protect it from the market increases over time. There are also no assurances to protect business owners from future tax increases. I thank the lead speaker for the

opposition, the member for Sandringham and Shadow Treasurer, for his contribution and effort, and I support his proposed amendments.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:35): I am very happy to speak on this pretty significant structural reform. It is not easy bringing about any kind of structural reform of this nature; nevertheless, it has received good support, and I will speak to that in a moment. One little caveat, just listening to some of the commentary in the chamber, that I think we need to bear in mind in any case is that global economic circumstances have changed, and we know that governments around the world are having to deal with the COVID aftermath and rising inflation. I just put that little caveat. We are going to speak to what is happening in Victoria, but we always have to speak to that global as well as local context, because it is relevant. I just wanted to acquit that to start off.

Secondly, I think it is a good idea to speak to the actual purpose of the bill. We know that we announced in the 2023–24 Victorian budget that our government is progressively abolishing stamp duty on commercial and industrial property and replacing it with a more efficient annual tax based on unimproved land value, to be called the commercial and industrial property tax. I know I am probably reiterating some points that have been made in this chamber, but it is just to keep clarity on the issue, because there were a few tangents. I get that. That is what happens in a debate in the chamber; nevertheless, I will just bring it back to the core element of what this reform is seeking to do.

The new tax system will apply to commercial and industrial property transactions with both a contract and a settlement date on or after 1 July 2024 – obviously that is a very important detail for those who will be affected by these changes – and for these properties stamp duty will be paid one final time on the property if and when it is transacted. The new annual commercial and industrial property tax will be payable 10 years after the final stamp duty payment regardless of whether that property has transacted again. If a property is sold again, stamp duty will not apply if the property continues to be used for commercial and industrial purposes.

A couple of further points to keep accuracy when it comes to the core elements of this particular structural reform: to smooth the transition to the new tax system, the government will give purchasers of commercial or industrial properties who meet the eligibility criteria as outlined in the information sheet the option of accessing a government-facilitated transition loan as an alternative to self-financing the up-front stamp duty amount. You can see there are mechanisms built in to help the Victorian community for whom this reform is relevant through the change. In this way, eligible purchasers who choose the transition loan option transition to an annual repayment from the time of purchase, freeing up capital businesses can use to invest in expanding and in employing more workers.

The commercial and industrial property tax will be set at a flat 1 per cent of the property's unimproved land value, with no complicated rate schedules or thresholds. I hope that allays some of the concerns of some people raising the issue of how complex this change is. You can see there is a specific mechanism built in there to mitigate complexity with the transition and these changes. The reform will not apply to commercial or industrial property purchased before 1 July 2024. I suppose that makes sense, bearing in mind that 1 July 2024 is when this kicks in. Properties primarily used for residential, primary production, community services, sport or heritage or cultural purposes, as coded by the valuer-general, will not have the reform apply to them.

I just do want to reiterate one point, because there really is good support behind this particular reform. Reforming stamp duty has been recommended by numerous inquiries over recent decades, including the Henry tax review, and by the Productivity Commission and the Grattan Institute, and I think we would all agree that they are esteemed organisations and/or reviews that have taken place. There is no question in terms of evaluating the merits of these changes – we can see that they are backed in.

So what will replacing stamp duty with commercial industrial property tax actually do? What is the benefit? It will encourage businesses to expand or set up in the best location – for example, closer to their customers or where there is a growing workforce, and I think we can all agree that makes good

common sense; support businesses to invest in buildings and infrastructure, also a good thing; and promote more efficient use of commercial and industrial land.

To pick up on a point that was raised in the chamber about vacant land and mechanisms that are used to balance how land is actually used, in this day and age having land idle is not in anyone's interest, particularly over a protracted period, so it makes good sense. You can see where the incentive is from a government point of view to make sure that precious, precious land is used in the most optimal way to the betterment of all Victorians. It is not penance as such when we are looking at how various taxation elements may apply. When you are looking at land that is idle and/or vacant, it is not about penance but about incentivising and encouraging that land to be used in the best possible way. Particularly in metropolitan areas but I think also, respectfully, in regional areas as well, how land is used matters to all. I know even speaking from my own electorate, the electorate of Albert Park, that certainly members of the community get pretty angry when they see land that just sits there for years and is not actually optimised and is not actually serving the community or housing something – it is not actually offering a benefit to community. So you can see where the drivers are to make sure that land is optimally used in our community.

The other thing I do want to speak to with this structural reform is that there were some comments around the chamber I think yesterday that were trashing and talking down the economy. I just want to perhaps offer some other elements to balance some of that commentary, because I will say it was unfair, and I believe that there were some inaccuracies in some of those narratives that were put forward to the chamber. For instance, since November 2014 our economy has generated almost 800,000 new jobs, including more than 170,000 jobs in regional Victoria. I have also heard some themes about regional Victoria: what are we doing for regional Victoria? It is very fair for persons to raise the question, so let us answer those questions. I am very happy to answer those questions.

When the pandemic hit our shores in 2020, we invested to protect Victorian lives and livelihoods of course. I cannot speak for others, but certainly I was very concerned about my friends, my relatives, my mother and other people who could have been impacted by the pandemic. We had a target to create 400,000 jobs by 2025, with half of them created by 2022, and of course jobs matter because that is how you earn a living, right. We far exceeded our ambitious goal well ahead of schedule, with employment rising by more than 560,000 since September 2020. Of course we want to do even more – you know, we do not rest on our laurels – creating more opportunities for Victorians to find a job and giving them the training they need for the future.

I do want to speak to something that is very close to the heart, particularly in the seat of Albert Park but not exclusively of course, and that is our wonderful creative state. Sometimes people say 'Why do you invest in the arts? You're just investing in paintings' or something of the like, but of course there are many, many benefits to our brilliant creative arts industry, none the least that it brings people together and none the least that it attracts tourists and visitors who then go and spend in the cafes and bars and restaurants, and then they go and stay in the hotels. It actually brings community together as well; it is encouraging people to be together in a very positive way. There are so many benefits, but let me speak specifically, just as an example, to the NGV Triennial. I hope everyone here had the opportunity to attend. There were 1 million visitors to that. Of course they do not just come and look at and experience that wonderful event. What do they do? 'I think I'll have a coffee, might have a cake. I'm going to go out to dinner. I'm going to catch up with my friends. I might do some other touristy activities while I'm there. I'm going to stay in the local hotel.' There are so many overflowing benefits – not to mention the stellar reputation of Victoria and Victorian artists. We are fantastic here in this great state.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (12:45): I rise to speak on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024, and I applaud those opposite for finally doing something to make it easier for businesses and corporations in this state. Stamp duty on commercial and industrial properties has long acted as a roadblock to entrepreneurial endeavours in our state, stifling the growth of new businesses and constraining established ones from expanding or relocating as they evolve. With a staggering

265,000 commercial and industrial properties dotting Victoria's landscape, the removal of these up-front costs stands to unleash a wave of business growth and job creation and propel our economy forward.

However, while we wholeheartedly endorse the elimination of stamp duty from commercial and industrial transactions, we cannot overlook several concerns regarding the government's proposed reform scheme. It is our duty on this side of the house to scrutinise any legislation, ensuring it achieves its intended goals without unintended consequences or undue burden on stakeholders. The shift proposed today towards a more predictable and efficient property tax system is commendable, and it aligns with what independent think tanks, policy experts and industry leaders have long advocated. This bill introduces significant changes, abolishing stamp duty on commercial and industrial properties, instituting a flat property tax rate of 1 per cent on unimproved land values and implementing a transition loan program to ease the financial burden on businesses during this shift.

These elements are designed to streamline tax administration, encourage business investment and ultimately foster job creation within Victoria. Yet one cannot ignore that these benefits, which could have been stimulating our economy earlier, are only being realised now, after years of unnecessary delay. However, the government have decided that every property sold under the new rules must pay them one last juicy stamp duty fee, one final lump sum, to pay the interest on the government's reckless debts, which I have spoken about in this place many times before. We know they are projected to be, in 2027, \$177.8 billion of debt, more than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined, this reckless debt. This is what they are trying to do, to hike up the taxes so that they can continue to pay off this debt before it switches over to land tax 10 years after the sale.

It is not enough that these changes come too late; they also must arrive too slowly. Following a decade-long transition period these same property owners will then be subject to the commercial and industrial property tax, CIPT, levied at 1 per cent of unimproved land value annually. This dual taxation approach poses a significant financial strain, particularly for investors intending to hold onto their properties for the long term. The truth of it is this: the government's proposal for a 1 per cent commercial and industrial property tax, CIPT, rate lacks transparency and fails to provide a clear rationale for its selection. This tax scheme disproportionately burdens long-term owners of commercial and industrial properties, resulting in a significantly higher tax liability over time compared to traditional stamp duty payments. Given the prevailing trend of property ownership duration in Victoria, which typically spans 14 to 15 years, businesses and investors will ultimately incur greater costs under the CIPT regime than they would have under the previous stamp duty system.

In response to these concerns the coalition has put forward amendments urging the government to reconsider its CIPT rate, advocating instead for a more equitable and regionally sensitive approach. Under the coalition's proposed amendments the CIPT rate would be reduced to 0.8 per cent for metropolitan properties and 0.4 per cent for regional properties, striking a balance between revenue generation and fairness for all Victorian taxpayers. This alternative proposal not only alleviates the tax burden on businesses and investors but also ensures a revenue-neutral outcome for the government, providing a simpler and fairer tax solution for Victorian families.

The government's proposal further poses a significant threat to regional Victoria's economic vitality. Currently a stamp duty concession exists for commercial and industrial properties purchased in regional areas, providing a crucial incentive for investment outside metropolitan regions. However, the proposed CIPT rate effectively eliminates these regional stamp duty concessions, subjecting all properties, regardless of location, to a uniform 1 per cent tax on unimproved land value. This blanket approach not only undermines the attractiveness of investing in regional Victoria but also erodes the government's commitment to fostering economic growth beyond inner-city Melbourne. Recognising the importance of regional investment, the Victorian Liberals and Nationals advocate for a fairer and more regionally sensitive tax solution. Our proposed amendments to this bill call for a reduced CIPT rate of 0.4 per cent for commercial properties in regional Victoria, ensuring that businesses and

investors in regional areas are not unfairly burdened and that investment incentives remain intact for the benefit of the entire state.

The government's bill, with its intricate replacement of stamp duty with a protracted annual property tax, introduces unnecessary complexity into the taxation system. Industry stakeholders have voiced valid concerns regarding the potential market disruptions stemming from this reform, highlighting the government's own admission of difficulty in anticipating its full impact. The cautionary tale of the ACT serves as a stark reminder of the risks associated with poorly implemented stamp duty reform, where a long process led to an increased taxation burden for commercial property owners. Moreover, the looming implementation of these reforms from 1 July 2024 raises fears that investors may opt to retain existing properties rather than transact in Victoria, leading to the emergence of a fragmented commercial property market with multiple tiers of taxation obligations.

Labor's proposed reforms not only exacerbate transactional complexities but also jeopardise Victoria's competitiveness, potentially driving commercial property investors towards alternative jurisdictions with more favourable tax environments. While the reform may incentivise short-term transactions, it neglects the needs of a sizeable portion of investors who rely on stable, long-term investments for their portfolios. So let us be real: those opposite simply cannot be trusted to reform our stamp duty system. Last month Premier Allan ruled out transitioning from stamp duty to land tax, stating that the idea 'is not before the government through this budget process'. The government are so good at backflipping it is a tragedy that they will not be able to show off their gymnastics skills at the cancelled Commonwealth Games. We on this side of the house stand for stamp duty reforms, as the tax continues to distort the housing market, inflate prices and disproportionately hurt first home buyers who do not have existing equity.

Furthermore, if those opposite are so serious about reforming stamp duty, why don't they rule out new property taxes in the upcoming budget? Victorians pay the highest property tax in Australia, and the property investment professionals of Australia have named Victoria as the worst state in the nation for renters due to the high stamp duty and new land taxes. In dispelling a prevalent myth, it is crucial to recognise that stamp duty's impacts extend beyond homebuyers, resonating deeply within Victoria's rental market. Recent figures from Homes Victoria for the December 2023 quarter underscore a concerning trend, a notable 0.8 per cent dip in rental bonds, compared to the same period in 2022. This decline marks a stark departure from the consistent 3.2 per cent annual increase witnessed over the past decade, highlighting an unprecedented shift in the rental landscape. Concurrently, PropTrack's latest data –

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, we are speaking on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024, we are not talking about residential land tax. If you could direct the current member on her feet – who is currently sitting – to come back to talking about commercial and industrial tax reform, it would benefit the debate.

Sam Groth: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, it was actually the member for Preston who brought up residential land tax for the first time during this debate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): There is no point of order.

Nicole WERNER: In the 20 seconds I have, let us hear from the Treasurer. He said scrapping stamp duty would plunge the state a further \$30 billion into debt and result in funding cuts to health and education. I am concerned about those for next Tuesday. We are concerned in my community, in Warrandyte, about those. It simply does not pass the pub test.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (12:55): I am delighted to rise in support of this bill, which provides for some very important reforms to the taxation landscape for commercial and industrial property in Victoria, namely moving away from stamp duty towards a more efficient annual tax for these properties. This is quite a moment in history, a moment to be acknowledged, because in bringing forward this bill we are the first government in Victoria's history with a plan to abolish stamp duty on

commercial and industrial properties in this state. It is something which has been spoken about for a very long time, and indeed reforming stamp duty, as others have said, has been recommended by numerous inquiries over recent years, including the Henry tax review, the Productivity Commission and the Grattan Institute. But of course as a government of action it will be the Allan Labor government to deliver it.

On the surface of it taxation can seem like a rather dry topic to some, but one of the more appealing parts of our roles as parliamentarians is delving into policy spaces and discourses which we may not otherwise. For me taxation is one of these, and the more I learn, the more appreciation I have for the meticulous work of our outstanding Treasurer of Victoria. With the sharpest of analysis, our Treasurer must navigate the pull and thrust of markets, investments, interest rates and the potential for far-reaching impact with changes to our taxation system. In this case, with this bill we are looking at transformational reform. This is not a simple adjustment to the tax settings, it is a completely different way of taxing commercial and industrial property. The aim is to support businesses to grow and to expand, because supporting businesses to thrive is one of the absolute priorities of our government and my own work as the member for Northcote. On any given day commercial and industrial trade is buzzing across my electorate: up and down High Street, through Westgarth Village, Ruckers Hill, Northcote, Thornbury and Preston South, up Plenty Road or down in Fairfield Village, tucked into Miller and Gilbert streets, along Heidelberg Road or across the industrial warehouses of Thornbury, Preston and Alphington. Our suburbs are a hub of activity, bringing jobs, productivity and economic opportunity to not just our suburbs but the state of Victoria.

It is fair to say, though, that they have faced significant challenges over the last few years. When we all stayed home to protect each other, trade became difficult, workers struggled for income and business owners battled with the unknown. At that time I made it my mission to do everything in my power to push for more and better supports for our local businesses. In this place I stood up to ensure that as many businesses as possible were made eligible for our relief grants, including the numerous brewpubs like Moon Dog World, 3 Ravens and Tallboy & Moose in the inner north, which originally were excluded, and bespoke support for our many great music venues that were under immense stress. We hosted business round tables with multiple ministers so our local traders could relay directly to decision-makers the pressures they were facing, and at the time we spoke a lot about how we would revive and revitalise our business precincts and help them to bounce back after such a tough period. Out of these early conversations were born two very important local festivals, The Eighty-Six and Northcote Rise, both one-of-a-kind festivals with a unique inner-north flavour, bringing tens of thousands of visitors to our suburbs, creating a groundswell of economic activity and raising the profile of Northcote. The Eighty-Six music festival alone drew an audience of 29,000 and delivered \$4.9 million directly into our economy, resulting in a multiplied impact of \$14.9 million. Over 600 musicians and DJs were engaged, over 65 music venues and over 200 small businesses – an utter triumph for our creative and small business ecosystem. I mention this because it goes to the priority and the emphasis we put as a government on supporting and investing in our state's future and our economy. And it is working.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Police

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I rise to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation will answer questions for the portfolios of police, crime prevention and racing.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Health funding

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. When asked in March, the Minister for Health failed to rule out forced hospital amalgamations. Will the Premier rule out forced changes that cut local health services or jobs whether those changes are called hospital amalgamations, consolidations, mergers or any other name?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, because of course the only people who talk about cutting health services are those who actually did it.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, can you draw the Premier back to the question?

The SPEAKER: The Premier had only just commenced her answer.

Jacinta ALLAN: The question referred to cuts to hospital services, and I was just wanting to make it absolutely clear, in providing a response to the question from the Leader of the Opposition, that the only people who have cut health services and who have closed hospitals are those opposite. They are the only ones who closed hospitals, who cut country hospital services to places like Elmore, to places like Eildon, to places like Murtoa –

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question, and I ask you to bring her back to answering the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is giving some context, I believe, but I do ask her to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am wanting to make that clear because we do not cut and close. I hope that makes it clear for the Leader of the Opposition. We do not cut or close. What we do is focus on rebuilding and building up our health system. For example, we had to buy back the Latrobe Valley hospital from the failed privatisation of those opposite. I was so proud to join with the health minister recently when we had not just completed an upgrade to stage 1 of that hospital or stage 2; it was stage 3 of the redevelopment of the Latrobe Valley hospital. We are also investing heavily in the hospital in Mildura, now a public hospital thanks to our investment.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the history lesson is useful, but can you bring the Premier back to actually answering the question of ruling out forced amalgamations?

The SPEAKER: The Premier was still being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: I understand why those opposite are a little sensitive when we call them out, particularly in National Party electorates, who bore the brunt of the cuts and closures under previous Liberal–National governments. We will continue to support country communities, and we will continue to support the hard work of the healthcare workers who provide top-quality public health care to communities right across the state.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mildura is warned.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): AMA President Dr Jill Tomlinson, when asked about job cuts linked to forced amalgamation, said, ‘Cutting staff, no matter where you cut them from, does impact frontline services and clinical services.’ How many frontline services will suffer due to the government’s secret plan to force health services to amalgamate?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed without warning. Member for Tarneit!

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): I was asked by the Leader of the Opposition about a potential government decision, a possible government decision, its impact on frontline services and how they may suffer. These are the same people who demanded we let COVID rip without any consideration of the impact that would have.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I understand the need for context, but the Premier is just being nasty and not answering the questions that are being asked.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is entirely relevant because the question was framed about supporting frontline services, and that is what we are absolutely focused on, whether it is when we came to government, following the cuts and closures of a former Liberal–National government and how we had to build back up those health services, whether it is coming to government after nurses had lost their jobs, whether it is coming to government and, particularly, working through a pandemic, where those opposite wanted to inflict more pain and more hardship on our healthcare system during a one-in-100-year pandemic. We will continue to support not just our hospitals but also those hardworking healthcare workers.

Ministers statements: youth mental health

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:09): On this side of the chamber we know every investment we make in public education delivers dividends right across our state. We also appreciate that it takes a village to raise a child. That is why with the Premier this morning I had the great privilege to be out at Collingwood College and Fitzroy High to see our mental health initiatives in government schools delivering dividends in a learning environment for kids that need that help. For some children getting through the school gate is a heroic effort every single day – kids that have depression, kids that suffer anxiety. We know the royal commission said one in seven young people do have some form of mental health –

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: I would not think they would be talking over me while I am talking about mental health in children. One in seven of our young people have a mental health condition. This government, following the landmark royal commission, has put more than \$600 million into rolling out initiatives right through our schools. That has seen a mental health practitioner in every secondary school helping students in a tailored environment. We are 50 per cent through rolling out mental health care in our primary schools, and we are not stopping there. Through all of our initiatives we are getting on and making sure that the Education State continues to deliver. Some 9000 students have benefited from our mental health initiatives. That equates to some 70,000 mental health sessions right across this state, because we believe no matter who you are, no matter your background, no matter your postcode, you deserve to have every opportunity to succeed in life.

We also know how difficult it is for some people and some sections of our community to get through the school gate. That is why we are also supporting parents. Our mental health practitioners now are the anchors in the community, supporting parents, supporting students and also giving important relief to teachers, who we know have the most important job in the world training up and getting the next generation to go on and succeed. We are proud. We will never cut this initiative. We will keep building schools.

Housing

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:11): My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Yesterday the Treasurer in question time said:

... as a government we recognise that that level of expenditure is crowding out private sector investment, and we will moderate it over time in order to provide the private sector with the opportunity to build ... housing ...

Is the Big Build crowding out residential construction?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:11): I thank the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party for the question. The member might well know that the Premier and I had the great privilege of being out at Box Hill on Sunday inspecting the future site of the Box Hill station, which will be part of the SRL project. We indicated as a consequence of that press conference that we were going to look at building 70,000 homes right along that corridor. This is really important, because we need to recognise we need more housing, more housing stock, a diversity of housing stock, right across the six precincts. We also indicated that we are doing this work progressively and we are working with communities, because we understand that these six precincts are all different and within each of these precincts there is a level of diversity. We need to work with the communities to work our way through that. That is really important, because then we can shape the outcomes. An alternative approach would be that we would just unilaterally rezone areas without any process.

Members interjecting.

Danny PEARSON: I do appreciate the Leader of the Opposition may have missed this, but the former Minister for Planning, the current member for Bulleen, unilaterally rezoned Fishermans Bend without any form of process or any form of consultation –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bulleen! The member for Bulleen will leave the chamber for an hour.

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Make that an hour and a half.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Assistant Treasurer and minister for infrastructure is clearly straying from what we are asking here, which is whether residential construction is actually going to be able to be done with all of the infrastructure projects. I ask you to bring him back to the question. You cannot do it all at once –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield has made his point of order. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question, and I ask you to bring him back to answering it.

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

Danny PEARSON: What we are doing on this side of the house is investing. We are creating a pipeline of activity, and we are creating a level of certainty and security for the private sector to invest. From 2006 to 2014 the average capital expenditure by the state government of Victoria was \$4.9 billion. Currently it is well over \$24 billion, and we are making sure we have got this pipeline of work and pipeline of activity in order to create that level of certainty to create the workforce that is required. The reality is that if you are against the Suburban Rail Loop you are against the jobs – there

will be 4000 jobs onsite by 2026 – and you are against the 70,000 homes that we are going to be building as a consequence of this project.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:15): Which major projects will Labor pause or cancel to give the private residential construction industry a larger opportunity to build housing?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:15): We are not going to take lectures from those opposite, who did not start or finish a major project in their time in office.

Members interjecting.

Danny PEARSON: Really? You have been asleep, Leader of the Opposition. We are getting on and delivering the projects that Victorians have overwhelmingly voted for at the last three elections, and we are committed to delivering on those projects. I am very much looking forward to Tuesday, when the Treasurer will hand down the budget.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:16): The Allan Labor government is getting on with the job of building 800,000 more homes for Victorians over the next decade. We have made it easier to build a small second home. We are clearing the backlog of housing applications. We have been speaking with thousands of Victorians about our long-term housing plan and the plan for Victoria. We have already said yes to more than 6000 homes, including through our development facilitation program since the housing statement.

Richard Riordan interjected.

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

Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.

Sonya KILKENNY: And notwithstanding the mischief from those opposite, we are working closely with community on each and every one of these projects. We are pulling every lever to build more homes, because we know the best way to help Victorians get a home is to build more of them in the places Victorians want to live.

But not everyone shares this view. In a rather nasty twist, those opposite seem to think that blocking new homes will somehow make them more affordable. But indeed where are they blocking them? In places like their own backyards: Brighton, Hawthorn, Kew –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lara can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Lara withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, may I refer you to the wise rulings of Speaker Brooks from February 2018 and August 2019 that ministers statements are not an opportunity to simply attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I hope, Manager of Opposition Business, that that was not a reflection on the Chair. The Minister for the Suburbs had not mentioned the opposition in her contribution that I am aware of.

Sonya KILKENNY: Did I mention Brighton? They are blocking homes in Brighton. Those opposite are slamming the door in the faces of young Victorians, older Victorians and families, saying, ‘No, you can’t live in our communities,’ places that are transport rich with great access to jobs and services. There is a fitting word to describe this approach: immoral. I have to admit I did not come up

with that word; credit goes to their very own Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability, who said in his inaugural speech:

... it is immoral that large sections of our inner cities, flush with good transport, schools, health care and other infrastructure, remain almost flat, with obsolete overlays denying young Victorians a chance to buy their first home where they want to live.

I could not have put it better myself. Unlike those opposite, we will not lock out Victorians from having a place to live and building the homes where they want to live.

Budget 2024–25

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:19): My question is to the Treasurer. Today the Treasurer stated:

It's not our intention to increase the burden either on developers or on business in the context of this budget.

Will the Treasurer rule out any new or increased property taxes in next week's budget?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:20): I thank the member for Sandringham for his question. I can give him this rock-solid assurance: I will deliver the budget on Tuesday next week, and incorporated within the budget will be the government's vision for the future. It will also incorporate the outstanding economic success that constitutes the performance of this government. Might I also say –

Members interjecting.

Tim PALLAS: There they go, laughing at the 560,000 Victorians that have got a job, putting down the outstanding economic success story that is this state. This government will reveal its budget in due course, and you will also get the opportunity to read it and to contemplate what could have been if you had only ever developed any competence whatsoever in your short four –

The SPEAKER: Order! Treasurer, through the Chair.

Tim PALLAS: If those opposite had demonstrated some capacity rather than losing the opportunity to govern by wasting four years and turning Victoria into an economic basket case. Let me tell you, now it is far from that; it is a standout performing economy in the nation.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:21): Ah, deary me. The Treasurer confirmed this morning that the government has informed the housing industry about a new livability charge which will hit home owners in every postcode across Melbourne and in every town across Victoria. When will this new tax be introduced?

The SPEAKER: Best leave the sighs and frustration to the Chair, member for Sandringham.

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:22): Thanks, Speaker. Ah –

The SPEAKER: Order! I will give you the same advice, Treasurer.

Tim PALLAS: The brutality of the attack is overwhelming; I can barely stand it. Can I assure the member that the government is always talking to the development industry. We are doing that because they often seek to talk to us about how we can best manage the economy and indeed the settings within which they operate. We will continue to talk to them, but we have no plans to effectively put in place any specific charge. We simply are prepared to engage with the industry to try and deal with their aspirations for the future.

Ministers statements: rental reform

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:23): Speaker, you will be pleased that I am giving the heavy breathing a miss. I rise to update the house on the strong track record of the Allan Labor government in supporting Victorian renters. We have already delivered over 130 reforms to make renting fairer and safer, from making it easier for renters to reclaim their bonds to allowing for those minor flourishes that make a house feel like home. When those opposite had the chance to support this landmark package of protections for renters, they voted against new minimum standards, including hot and cold water and permanent heating that actually works, they voted against the right to have pets and they voted against limits on bond amounts. Shameful.

But our reforms do not stop there. Our housing statement will build on these nation-leading protections by restricting rent increases between successive fixed-term agreements and by making rental applications simpler and easier, and we will also ban rental bidding for good. While we are there we are going to introduce a portable bond scheme and we are going to establish Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria as a faster, fairer and cheaper alternative to VCAT. On top of this, our housing statement will address the supply issues that we know drive rents up. We know that those opposite only see renters as a meal ticket, and those from the Greens political party are not much better, constantly voting against housing for our most vulnerable. Even their own councils are jumping ship. On this side of the chamber we are not about the fight, we are all about the fix. Only the Allan Labor government will deliver on our ambitious reform agenda that will see more Victorian renters safe, supported and able to make their house a home.

Medically supervised injecting facilities

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:25): My question is for the Premier. The Ryan report estimated that the Richmond supervised injecting room saved over 60 lives in the past five years. Its demonstrated success is the key reason why the report by Commissioner Lay unambiguously recommended establishing a supervised injecting room in the CBD – because it saves lives. With one or two fatal overdoses a month in the CBD – the highest rate of heroin harm in the country – has the government sought advice on the number of lives that will be lost as a result of the government rejecting the expert recommendation to establish a supervised injecting room in Melbourne’s CBD?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I thank the member for Brunswick for his question and make it clear that the government absolutely supports the inclusion of a medically supervised injecting facility as part of our overall policy framework that is a harm minimisation and health-led framework to supporting people who use drugs. I want to put that absolutely on the record. I also want to make clear that in considering the report by Ken Lay into the potential for a second site, in the CBD, I would say to the member for Brunswick it was not an unambiguous recommendation from Ken Lay. There were a number of recommendations, and they included the need for there to be community support and for the needs of the community to be also considered alongside the needs of people who use drugs.

I also point out to the member for Brunswick that 90 per cent of heroin deaths occur outside of the City of Melbourne. They occur in communities like mine, a long, long way from the CBD, which is why in considering Ken Lay’s report, in considering advice from the Ryan review and from other health experts, we have provided a statewide response to a statewide problem. This is a statewide problem. As I said, 90 per cent of all heroin overdoses and deaths occur outside the City of Melbourne. That is why, alongside responding to the Ryan review and strengthening the supports around the North Richmond medically supervised injecting facility, we are also strengthening supports for people who use drugs right across the state. For example, we know the role pharmacotherapy can play in supporting people who use drugs. It was also a recommendation of the Lay report that we strengthen access to pharmacotherapy, an area that has been getting harder and harder to access. That is why we are rolling out to the community health sector grants to strengthen the availability of pharmacotherapy.

We are also rolling out better access to naloxone. We are also going to commence a trial of hydromorphone, and we are going to place that trial in the new health hub in Flinders Street so that we can provide people who use drugs with access to treatment and also wraparound services. That is what we are responding to in the CBD, and we are also ensuring that people who use drugs and the people who love and support them can get access to these services across the state, because this is a statewide challenge and it needs a statewide solution.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:28): The Premier is right. This is a problem that does occur in many other parts of the state, and it is a problem that is going to come to a head if and when fentanyl and possibly nitazenes become more prevalent in the injecting drug markets. Fentanyl, for example, is a synthetic opioid that is around 50 or more times stronger than heroin and, importantly, acts faster, so it will kill people before help arrives. Fentanyl killed around 70,000 Americans in 2021, and it has been detected in several shipments in Melbourne. Will the government reconsider its rejection of these expert recommendations if overdoses due to synthetic opioids become more common in Melbourne?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): I want to be absolutely clear that the statewide response we released a week or so ago is absolutely focused on providing support to people now who have opioid addictions. The member’s question went to the increased risk of other opioids coming into the market, and that is why rolling out more access to pharmacotherapy now is so important, because pharmacotherapy is the most effective treatment option that is available now for opioid dependence.

Ellen Sandell interjected.

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

Member for Melbourne withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: It is also why we are trialling hydromorphone, because it is shown that that is a treatment that is found effective where others are not, and also giving more and better access to naloxone, which can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose as the person is having that overdose. It is about saving lives. This is a package that will save lives, which is why we are rolling it out statewide.

Ministers statements: housing

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:30): Victoria is leading the nation in the build-to-rent market. State incentives are helping to expand rental options for people at all stages of life. We know that, as long as rental supply is low, rental prices will remain high. That is why we are approving and delivering more homes for renters in established suburbs close to jobs, transport and services. Eligible build-to-rent developments are prioritised for fast-track approvals, while those completed and operational from 2022 to 2031 will receive a 50 per cent land tax concession for up to 30 years and a full exemption from absentee owner surcharge. For the edification of those opposite, that is two tax cuts. As of last year, Melbourne was home to more than half of all build-to-rent projects completed in Australia and 83 per cent of the total number of units built. At the time, the *Australian Financial Review* described Melbourne as the only Australian city that will have developed a build-to-rent market of scale by 2030.

Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who opposes housing in his own electorate, or the member for Brighton, who shamefully campaigned to close a boarding house for rough sleepers in his electorate, we are a government that actually want to deliver stable and affordable housing for Victorians. We acknowledge that this is a housing crisis in this country – that young people, or at least young people without a trust fund, are not getting the same opportunity to own their own property or get into secure affordable rentals the way the older generation did. Housing may just be the defining issue of our times, and this government is not going to shirk from the hard decisions. Instead we are going to keep delivering the housing outcomes that Victorians need and deserve, and build to rent, like our big build, is a vital part of that.

Government performance

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:32): My question is to the Premier. After 10 years of Labor we pay the highest taxes in the country, we have the biggest debt, we wait the longest for a hospital bed and an ambulance, we have record-low educational outcomes, energy bills have skyrocketed and we have a housing crisis with the lowest rate of new homes. After 10 years of Labor, why are Victorians worse off?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:33): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, clearly provided to him by the member for Sandringham. This is a question that demonstrates just how out of touch the Leader of the Opposition is with what is actually going on in people's lives in Victoria right now. We have heard from the Treasurer already how Deloitte Access Economics forecasts Victoria to have the strongest economic growth of any state in the next five years. We have more Victorians in work than ever before. We had to put Victorians back to work, because in the four years that the Leader of the Opposition was doing all sorts of activities when he was working as legal counsel in the then Premier's office –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was an important question – not for the Premier to be nasty again.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: As if I needed any more evidence as to how out of touch the opposition is, that point of order demonstrates it. All week – for months now – women have been demanding a better conversation, a better culture, about respect for women, and that starts with all of us. When you only call women in this place nasty, when you only call women in this place tawdry, you are not demonstrating the sort of leadership we all need to be showing about what respect for women looks like and what happens when you do not. When you sit in that chair and hiss across the table –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lowan will leave the chamber for half an hour. The minister will leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Lowan and Minister for Prevention of Family Violence withdrew from chamber.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question, and we will not be lectured by a Premier whose colleagues the member for Ringwood and the member for South Barwon were allowed to get away with their behaviour for years.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, that is not a point of order. I do ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition! The member for Eureka will leave the chamber for an hour. I will not tolerate this kind of interjection.

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about 10 years of what has been achieved in this state for Victorians: a Royal Commission into Family Violence, where we have implemented each and every one of the 227 recommendations that are focused on making our community safer for women who experience violence at the hands of a current or former partner, and we are now redoubling our efforts with a focus on women's safety across the community; a royal commission into mental health; a rebuilding of the education system; a rebuilding of the health system; and a reopening of train lines. Why do we have to do these things? Because when those opposite have the privilege of being in government they cut funding to hospitals, they cut funding to schools and they cut funding to the education maintenance allowance and to Fresh Fruit Friday, they close train lines and they cut train services. Labor

governments, when we come to government, have two tasks before us: we have to repair the damage from those opposite –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield and the Leader of the House will cease yelling at each other across the table.

Jacinta ALLAN: Labor governments have two tasks when they follow a Liberal government into government: we have to repair and rebuild from the damage that they inflict, and then we push forward and create jobs and build better services for people right across the state.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:38): Will the Premier rule out making life even harder for Victorians in next week’s budget?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): As the Treasurer has said previously, he will stand here next Tuesday, he will hand down a budget and it will be another Labor budget that is focused on the things that matter for the Victorian community. It will focus on jobs. It will focus on supporting families. It will focus on doing what families here in Victoria expect us to do. While the Leader of the Opposition is more worried about what the member for Sandringham is up to, we will remain focused on what is important to the Victorian community.

Ministers statements: housing

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): As part of our plan to build more homes right across the state, I am delighted to update the house on how that plan includes building more homes around the Suburban Rail Loop. We have seen how Victorians have backed in our Big Build, and they want us to get on and deliver the programs across the state and also the Suburban Rail Loop – a project that is not just building a train line but also about how we are building communities at the same time. By 2026, 4000 Victorians will be working on the Suburban Rail Loop. Tunnel-boring machines will be in the ground as we progress this vitally important project, and as part of that we are also doing the work now to support more homes being built close to transport, close to jobs, close to health services and close to schools, universities and TAFEs. This is where we know Victorians want more choices about where they live and where they raise a family. These suburbs sound just like the communities around Hawthorn, for example, an established suburb with schools, public transport and where we know more and more renters are flocking.

It has been brought to my attention that there is a new housing policy – a yimby–nimby policy, something that has brought both those two elements together. There is the yes in Melton and Berwick and Yuroke for more homes in those communities but no in Malvern and Brighton and Yarra. There is more affordable housing, but just do not put it anywhere near some established suburbs. This yimby–nimby policy is saying yes in Kalkallo but no in Kew, yes in Cranbourne but no in Caulfield, and even yes in Hastings but absolutely not in Hawthorn. This is why it is only a Labor government that is looking at how we can build more homes right across Victoria, giving people more choice about where they live.

Annabelle Cleeland: On a point of order, Speaker, regarding overdue questions, I am currently waiting on 18 overdue questions on notice, and it would be great if the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Crime Prevention, the Minister for Agriculture, the Minister for Environment, the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, the Minister for Emergency Services and the Attorney-General could all please send a response. In particular I would like to point out questions 508, 509 and 510 directed to the Minister for Emergency Services, which are now 286 days overdue. I would also

like to ask the Minister for Housing to get back to me with responses to eight questions that are now overdue. I will save your time and not list the 18 overdue questions and will pass them to the Clerk.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I noticed during the last question time when you asked the member for Tarnait to leave the chamber that he just did so without acknowledging the Chair, and I just wanted to make sure that that was brought to your attention, because I am not sure you were aware of it at the time and perhaps you might need –

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Eildon.

Constituency questions

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:44): (610) My question is to the Minister for Environment. How can the minister assist to sort out the impasse between the proponent of the Edgewater resort and conference centre in Warburton and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, which jeopardises the problem. Locals are excited by the prospect that the proposed \$100 million-plus investment will revitalise the former Weet-Bix factory, which has been vacant for over 20 years and is an eyesore in the town. Since 2006 there have been a couple of false starts, but now there is a strong commitment to invest and transform this property. However, there is still a hurdle to be jumped regarding the existence of a Crown licence and retrospective consent for weed management for fire protection. DEECA state there is no evidence of a current licence despite one being issued in 2006 and the proponent paying land tax each year, as a licence exists. This project must get off the ground and needs the minister's intervention.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:45): (611) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. What are the plans to implement a public bus network in the Mount Atkinson and Grandview estates? The Mount Atkinson and Grandview estates sit within the fastest growing LGA in this country, as my good friend the member for Melton knows. With over 7000 residents, and growing, the nearest bus stop is at Neale Road and is about a 50-minute walk away. I regularly witness residents from these estates attempting to navigate the rural-grade Hopkins Road. Not only do they have to contend with the 27,000 vehicles that use this route daily but they have to do so without proper footpaths, which makes walking along the road a major threat. These residents need better access to public transport services, and a public bus network needs to be implemented urgently.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:45): (612) My question is for the Minister for Health. What incentives are available to attract, retain and support nurses and other health professionals to fill the many health service jobs in my electorate of Mildura? Minister, the waiting lists for procedures such as laser surgery have blown out in Mildura to over a year, and yet a patient can travel to the Heidelberg clinic in the city and be in and out in under an hour. This is just one example of health service inequity in regional Victoria, much less the pay disparity. What can be seen from the great north-west is the ridiculously inflated pay packets for major project builds in the city, meanwhile our regional nurses are being insulted by an offer of 3 per cent and are now considering industrial action. A constituent in my community says:

We are medical professionals that requires 3 years at university and a minimum of 800 hours ... placement ...
... it's a disgrace.

When will this government prioritise the lives of regional Victorians over union control in the city?

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:46): (613) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport. How will the Victorian Labor government's \$1.25 million dollar investment to

upgrade Cole Reserve support recreational outcomes through Coburg Districts Football Club? Originally formed in 1951 and known as the Batman Football Club, playing out of a tin shed at Cole Reserve, the club was largely built off the back of the workers from the old Lincoln Mills factory on Gaffney Street in North Coburg. Becoming known as Coburg Districts in 1981, over its 73-year history the club has gone from strength to strength, with much to be proud of both on and off the pitch. Now home to around 400 players and a dozen teams made up of men, women, boys and girls, the club was recognised by AFL Victoria in 2019 as one of the most inclusive clubs in the state. That is why I was so proud to have secured the \$1.25 million for the club to support drainage and flood proofing infrastructure and lighting upgrades, allowing even more opportunities for people, including women and girls, to participate. I was very pleased to attend the club president's luncheon in June 2023 to commend the president of 36 years Allan Chandler, his wife Helen, co-president Dale Hough, vice-presidents Anthony Caccamo, Graeme Scoberg and Brad Nyman, and Dean Leeds.

Berwick electorate

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:47): (614) My question is the Minister for Police, and the question is: what information does the minister have about breaches of intervention orders and family violence safety notices that have occurred in my electorate of Berwick in the last 12 months? We are all aware that the incidence of family and domestic violence has been increasing, and I know that reporting through Narre Warren and Cranbourne police stations has increased dramatically. One of the things they struggle with is having the police numbers to respond. It is very important that our community understands how this is impacting people in feeling safe at home and what can be done by increasing numbers or ensuring that the vacancy rates within Victoria Police are filled so police vehicles can respond on time. Any person who has been or is a victim of domestic violence wants to know that if they do call for help, that help is going to be there as soon as possible. The best way to do this is to have an open and transparent system where people understand how many times intervention orders have been put forward within the electorate and how many times they have been breached, so people have a better understanding of what is going on and we can improve safety for all victims.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:49): (615) My question is for the Minister for Health and concerns the gender pain gap. Minister, how is the Allan Labor government supporting women in my electorate who are suffering pain from various health conditions and life experiences? I recently met with Kit McMahon – who is known to many here – the CEO of Women's Health in the South East, also known as WHISE, and she raised the issues facing women today, particularly the pain that women suffer and their need for greater support from our health system. WHISE are actively involved in helping women every day, and they plan to make a strong submission to the inquiry into women's pain, including the views and experiences of women in the south-east. The Premier and the Minister for Health recently expressed the importance of this issue and heard from attendees of the women's pain forum supported by WHISE that was held recently by my neighbour the member for Mordialloc. I look forward to hearing the minister's answers, and I will share the minister's response with my community.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:50): (616) My question is for the Minister for Youth Justice: when will the minister release a plan of action in response to increasing rates of youth reoffending in my electorate of Rowville? Residents in the electorate of Rowville are demanding that more action be taken in regard to youth crime. Currently in Victoria youth crime has risen by 30 per cent and residents are terrified. Just recently a constituent informed me that his elderly wife is so terrified with the level of youth crime she is actually terrified to leave the house and is also scared that her home will be invaded, so she is in an impossible situation. Recently we had the situation where a mother is questioning why her own 14-year-old son is not locked up when he constantly is released on bail for serious crime. Currently that 14-year-old is up on over 100 charges.

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:50): (617) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. Minister, how many people have benefited from the pharmacy pilot program in my electorate of Bellarine? The pharmacy pilot program is increasing the number of primary care options for Victorians, freeing up GPs for people with more complex conditions and reducing non-urgent emergency department presentations. I know in February that there were more than 3700 Victorians statewide who had already accessed this care at pharmacies since the start of the pilot, and overwhelmingly people accessing care have been women. In the Bellarine there are seven local pharmacies included in this pilot, creating more accessibility for immediate care at no cost. I look forward to hearing from the minister and sharing their response with my community.

Shepparton electorate

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:51): (618) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the information I seek is: what is being done to address road safety in the Shepparton electorate? My electorate has had a run of horrific fatal road accidents in the past few months, and my thoughts are with the families who have lost their loved ones and also those who are recovering. There has been \$230 million cut from road safety programs in the past two years: \$150 million was cut from the TAC-funded safer system roads and infrastructure program, and the TAC marketing and road safety budget fell short by \$81 million in the past two financial years. I recently attended a roundtable discussion with RoadSafe Goulburn Valley. The group also shared their grave concerns at the alarming rise of road fatalities across my electorate and the cut in road safety program funding. I look forward to the minister's response regarding this matter.

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:52): (619) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, what information can you provide in relation to the next steps for the *Jacksons Hill Master Plan* in my community? As the minister is well aware, it was this government who stepped in and saved this important site within my local community. We then got on and created a significant piece of work, a master plan, and focused on the important use of this site. Add to that the more than \$10 million of investment at the Sunbury and Macedon Ranges Specialist School, more than \$3 million for the upgrade of Sunbury Primary and the delivery of the arts and cultural precinct, with \$3 million put towards that project as well. I note the support from this side of the house. I again ask the minister for what information can be provided on this important matter.

Bills**Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:53): Where we left off just before lunch was that I was talking about our government's investment in the future of our state and our economy and the fact that it is working. Victoria's robust economy has once again recorded Australia's strongest jobs growth over the past year, delivering the lowest unemployment rate of all of the states. Since November 2014 our economy has generated almost 800,000 new jobs, including more than 170,000 jobs in regional Victoria. We will keep working to boost Victoria's economy with targeted industry investments to drive innovation, secure our supply chains, support businesses and back our regions.

This reform to abolish stamp duty is a key part of that work. Currently when you buy or acquire a commercial or industrial property in Victoria you pay land transfer duty, also called stamp duty. Stamp duty adds to the cost of purchasing property. When applied to commercial and industrial properties it discourages businesses from investing, expanding or relocating their operations, impeding growth and productivity. The changes contained in the bill address this problem by abolishing stamp duty for

commercial and industrial properties that are sold after 1 July 2024, with land transfer duty to be replaced for these properties by a new commercial and industrial property tax after 10 years.

Just to be really clear on how this works: if a commercial or industrial property is contracted on or after that date – at settlement – a 10-year transition period will commence for that property. Additionally, at settlement the purchaser will have a choice to either pay the property's final land transfer duty liability as an up-front lump sum or finance the land transfer duty through a government-facilitated transition loan, allowing them to make annual loan repayments over 10 years. The new tax will start 10 years after the initial transaction regardless of whether the property has been transacted since. It will be set at a flat 1 per cent of the property's unimproved land value.

Economic modelling suggests that after 40 years this reform will have added 12,600 jobs to Victoria's economy and will have increased the size of the Victorian real economy by a cumulative \$50 billion in net present value terms. There are approximately 265,000 commercial and industrial properties in Victoria, so removing up-front costs on these types of purchases will accelerate business growth and boost jobs. It will mean that businesses can make that decision to move into a larger warehouse, for instance, to grow their workforce, to invest in better machinery or to refurb their space. Quite simply it gives business owners more choice and more ability to take that next step in their business journey.

And it is not just us saying so. As others have quoted, but for the benefit of my community in the inner north, Paul Guerra, CEO of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, did comment that:

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

Importantly, this change is designed to happen gradually over time as properties change hands, and it is revenue neutral – not an increase, as those opposite would have us believe. It simply replaces the lump sum stamp duty, which is a burden and an inhibitor to business growth.

It is important to note that the existing concessions and exemptions available for land transfer duty on commercial and industrial property will continue to be available when the reform commences, and that includes exemptions for transfers on deceased estates, a transfer to a spouse or a partner and purchases by charities and friendly associations or indeed the concessions for properties purchased in regional Victoria for commercial, industrial and other industry purposes.

These reforms are not done in isolation; they are delivered in the context of our broad suite of reforms to make things fairer for businesses, not least of which is the increase to the payroll tax threshold. Payroll tax is something I have spoken to many businesses about in my community, and the message has been loud and clear that the threshold is too low. So to better support small businesses across our state, from 1 July this year we will be raising the tax-free threshold to \$900,000, with a further increase to \$1 million from 1 July 2025. This is going to have a massive impact. We are also cutting the cost of running a business further by abolishing business insurance duty, becoming the first state in Australia to do so.

As the member for Northcote, I will continue to stand up for our local businesses in the inner north, and I described them in detail earlier in my contribution. From our shopfront traders right through to the dedicated manufacturers and those on the cutting edge of innovation that need that extra capital to be able to push their businesses to the next level – it is for them that this bill is coming through. This is a transformational step. It will have a tangible, positive impact in our community, in our business community, in our state. I commend the Treasurer for bringing it forward, and I commend the bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:59): I am pleased to rise today on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. It has been interesting listening to the debate today. The purpose of the bill is essentially to, we will say, 'reform' stamp duty in the commercial and industrial property area and go to a 1 per cent tax. I have spoken to a few people about this bill, and I have listened to a few of the contributions here today. Although we do not have an opposing position, there

are different narratives that have been going on. I suppose the one thing that concerns me about it is if we look at regional Victoria in particular and the reason for the amendments by the Shadow Treasurer to adjust the rate at 0.4 per cent, in regional Victoria at the moment we get a 50 per cent concession on stamp duty, which really does help drive investment into regional Victoria. It is important, especially in my community, that we do get investment to come back. With the absence of native timber logging and a few other industries that have now gone by the wayside, this discount for regional Victoria is extremely important.

We need to incentivise people, I agree. We need to get vacant land moving. We need to get the economy moving. We need to create jobs, and job creation equates to tax revenue at the end of the day, because people will spend more money. But I am not quite sure if I am totally convinced about the bill at the moment. The government have stated up to \$50 billion in cumulative net present value will be generated over the next 40 years due to this reform. Deloitte conducted the modelling to determine this figure. Their modelling assumes that removing stamp duty will see a greater quantum of property transactions and will incentivise the development of commercial and industrial land stock.

The point I make here is the word ‘assumes’ – I do not think we can ever assume that a bill will have the effect that it is intended to. In conversations with people I know that own industrial property and commercial property, when I explain the bill to them and I say, ‘Well, if you buy a \$1 million block and the stamp duty on that block is about \$55,000, sure, you get 10 years to pay that off – which is fine – with various interest applied to the loan; then when you calculate it in 10 years time, the unimproved value of that land might be worth \$1.2 million or \$1.3 million, and you are then paying 1 per cent of that. Effectively you will be paying that stamp duty again in five years time.’ When I explain to people how this bill works, they are a little bit hesitant. I am not saying the bill is totally wrong. All I am saying is I do not know if it is going to have the consequences it is intended to have, and that is having more transactions in the commercial and industrial space.

One comment to me from a property owner I know was, ‘Why would I sell my property that I own now, which I have paid the stamp duty on, to upgrade, and incur paying another stamp duty on the next property, then be subject to that 1 per cent every year after that?’ Essentially the 1 per cent is a tax. That is what it is. This will come on top of the taxes we have at the moment, especially around the land tax, which we have seen rise significantly – 200 per cent, 300 per cent, 400 per cent, 500 per cent in some cases. So I am not sure that this bill is going to incentivise people as it intends to do. As I said, this will come on top of the land tax. I know within the bill we say that this charge cannot be passed on to tenants. Well, I think you will find a commercial reality of this is a lot of landlords will pass this on to the tenant. A lot of landlords will say, ‘Okay, well, I have got to pay this 1 per cent levy – that is another \$13,000; I can only absorb so much through the increases in land taxes and whatever other taxes are coming through.’ So it could possibly be more than likely that this 1 per cent does get passed on when they renew the lease. Their lease will go up that \$200 to \$300 a week to cover the cost of that 1 per cent. I know it is not the intent of the bill, I know what the law says, but the commercial reality is completely different when it comes to negotiations. Once you have negotiated a lease, both parties will sign off on it and away they go. That does concern me around this. I just do not know if it is going to get the intended effect.

It does affect a lot of properties. In the Australian valuation property classifications, it goes from codes 200 to 449 and 600 to 699. I actually did look them up, and that is hundreds and hundreds of different classifications. It does affect a wide range of properties, and it will be a wide range of transactions where this tax comes into play. There are some exemptions in there when we talk about this, but another concern for me is if the purchaser decides to take up the government’s offer of paying the stamp duty off over a 10-year period with a base rate of 4.87 per cent – and that is okay; I do not have a problem with that – the margin risk rate of 2.25 per cent is set by one person and one person only, and that is the Treasurer. I do get a little bit concerned when we put that amount of faith in one person. I do not know the Treasurer well. I do not know if he is a good guy or a bad guy.

A member: No, he is a great guy.

Wayne FARNHAM: I am sure he is. I know my hairdresser is a bit better than his, and he is a great guy. But it does worry me that a margin of 2.25 per cent is set just by the Treasurer. That is concerning. I thought maybe a panel to review the rate would be the way to go so you have varying opinions around the rate, but for one person to decide the rate I think could be a little bit dangerous. We could be having a bad year and that margin could be decided to be 5 per cent. Who knows. I do not know. But it does not have to come back to the Parliament, it is only set by the Treasurer, and I think that causes some concern.

The Shadow Treasurer did move a reasoned amendment on this bill, and I think it is important that the government take note of this reasoned amendment, because it is there especially to protect regional Victoria, as I stated earlier, and that 50 per cent deduction they do get now.

The SPEAKER: Order! The sitting of the house is suspended. Members, please leave in an orderly manner and follow the direction of the fire wardens to the exits and the assembly areas.

Sitting suspended 3:06 pm until 3:30 pm.

Wayne FARNHAM: I was talking about the reasoned amendment that the Shadow Treasurer put forward, if I remember correctly, and I will just touch on it briefly. The amendment requires:

- (1) further consultation on the proposed CIPT rate including the cost neutrality of the proposed reforms and how the reforms will affect owners of regional and non-regional commercial and industrial properties;
- (2) providing investors with certainty and confidence against any potential future tax increases; and
- (3) making public the modelling assumptions underpinning the \$50 billion economic uplift anticipated from this reform scheme and the rationale for the risk margin component of the proposed 10-year transitional government loan, including any future changes made to the risk margin component of the loan rate'.

I do feel that these reasoned amendment requirements are logical, and I think they are in there for good reason, to give a little bit more transparency and a little bit more accountability as to why rates have been set.

Pretty well I am done, I think. I lost track 2 minutes ago. Someone else can jump up and have a go. I am out.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:32): How do I follow that? I am very happy to speak in support of this legislation, the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. This bill is a game changer and transitions the state away from the inefficient stamp duty tax for commercial and industrial properties and instead proposes a more efficient commercial and industrial property tax. Land transfer duty, better known as stamp duty to many people, as it exists right now in Victoria is a tax paid within the first 30 days of purchasing new property, for which the rate you pay is based on the value of the property being bought, with more expensive properties obviously having a higher rate of stamp duty. This means that it is very common for a purchaser to have to cough up tens of thousands of dollars in tax at the same time as they have to pay for a deposit and other expenses that come up when purchasing a new property. To quote Brendan Coates, writing for the *Conversation* and the Grattan Institute:

Stamp duties on commercial and industrial properties act as a brake on new businesses, stop many businesses from shifting premises as they grow and ultimately mean we don't use scarce urban land as efficiently as we should.

That is why we are phasing out stamp duty for commercial and industrial properties – because we understand that these inefficiencies are holding us back. Reforming stamp duty has been recommended by numerous inquiries over recent decades, including the Henry tax review, the Productivity Commission and the Grattan Institute. The commercial and industrial property tax will have a flat rate of 1 per cent of the unimproved site value of the property, will have no tax-free threshold and will only apply to properties that are liable for land tax. Commercial and industrial property tax will be administered by the commissioner of state revenue. For qualifying properties, the next purchasers of commercial or industrial property on or after 1 July 2024 pay stamp duty one last

time. After a 10-year transition period from this entry transaction a more efficient commercial and industrial property tax will apply to such properties annually. If the same property sells a subsequent time, a duty exemption will apply as long as the property still has a commercial or industrial use.

The commercial and industrial property tax will have administrative features that are similar to existing land tax. Commercial and industrial property tax will be assessed on the land owned as at midnight on 31 December in the calendar year preceding the tax year and site values will be assessed as at 1 January in the calendar year preceding the tax year. Unpaid commercial and industrial property tax will be a first charge on the land and will remain on the land until it is paid, and this is consistent with land tax. Passing on the commercial and industrial property tax through residential agreements will be prohibited. Separately, amendments to the Retail Leases Act 2003 will prohibit the passing through of commercial and industrial property tax to retail tenants covered by that act. Commercial and industrial property tax will be separate from and in addition to existing land taxes.

To help transition from stamp duty, the state government is offering a fixed-rate transition loan that will allow people to pay their stamp duty over a 10-year period instead of in a lump-sum format. The loan will be provided by the Treasury Corporation of Victoria on commercial terms, including a fixed market-based interest rate. Annual repayments over 10 years will be set up-front to provide applicants with certainty. This in itself removes a lot of the barriers around stamp duty as it no longer makes it a single lump-sum payment right when a business is trying to invest its resources into expanding or moving premises.

If properties that have entered the reform are subdivided, the child lots will inherit the reform scheme status of the property being subdivided. This will ensure the continuity of the reform and is an integrity measure against property owners using subdivisions to withdraw a property from the reform.

By removing a key barrier to more effective investments, the benefits will multiply across the economy. Removing up-front costs on commercial and industrial property purchases will accelerate business growth and boost jobs, with the cumulative increase in the size of the Victorian economy as a result of this reform being up to \$50 billion in net present value terms. To quote Brendan Coates, again in writing for the *Conversation* and Grattan Institute:

Economists estimate that stamp duties on commercial property cost the economy between 50 cents and 60 cents for every dollar of revenue they raise – more than any other state tax.

It is clear that expert opinion is on the side of the government when it comes to the changes that are being discussed today. Looking just at the change in tax revenue over the budget and forward estimates period, businesses will be paying around \$260 million less in stamp duty over the next four years as a result of this reform.

I am proud to represent a diverse range of industrial and commercial industries. Areas such as the Noble Park industrial precinct, the Mulgrave business district and the Springvale activity centre are bustling communities that employ hundreds of residents from the surrounding suburbs. I know that when those businesses are doing well it means the local community is doing well, which means more jobs and better wages for locals. That is why this legislation is incredibly important to my community. It removes barriers for expansion from local businesses and allows for greater flexibility for small businesses. In the last few weeks I have been all over my constituency, talking to small business owners and asking them about their views on the changes to stamp duty and how they will help their business. From cafes in Wheelers Hill to warehouses in Noble Park, businesses across my electorate support these changes and say they would help them grow over the long term.

Recently I visited a business in Mulgrave that is using a small office space. It would ideally like to expand into a bigger space and would really benefit from these changes to stamp duty. This legislation not only benefits established businesses but also paves the way for aspiring entrepreneurs and start-ups. By shifting from a one-time stamp duty payment to an annual commercial and industrial property tax, we are making it easier for new ventures to enter the commercial and industrial landscapes.

Imagine the entrepreneur with a revolutionary idea or the mum-and-dad aspiring business owners who want to open up that cafe hesitating at the threshold of launching their business due to the daunting up-front costs of stamp duty. With this reform we are providing them with a more manageable financial environment to make that leap, fostering innovation and economic growth in our community.

I would like to use the final moments of my speaking time to reaffirm my support for this legislation. The Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024 will help small businesses across my electorate. It will mean new businesses can establish themselves and existing ones will have greater opportunities to expand. Only the Allan Labor government is fighting for the interests of the people of Mulgrave and beyond, and only the Allan Labor government is declaring that Victoria is open for business. I commend this bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:40): I too rise to talk about the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. Firstly, I would like to thank the member for Sandringham for his job leading this discussion over the property tax reform. As he said, the reform that wants to come in is on the front of it that we can see. Being a small business owner myself, anything that will ease the burden on small business owners by not having to pay as much in stamp duty is something that I think is a good thing. But maybe there is a little bit of not devil in the detail but uncertainty, like the member for Narracan spoke about just a couple of moments ago before we were all rushed out of the chamber.

I would just like to mention that the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Grattan Institute and the property council are all broadly supportive of removing stamp duty and commercial and industrial transactions. As I said, it is a good thing if we can achieve this. The government in their own estimations have said that there are over 265,000 commercial and industrial properties throughout Victoria, here in Melbourne and obviously spread across regional Victoria, and removing these up-front costs on these types of property purchases will accelerate business growth and boost jobs, and that is what is needed.

We need to promote businesses enticing workers to come in. I know it is a big thing down in my electorate of Morwell; it does not matter if you are working in the commercial industry or in the hospitality industry, right across the board the key issue is enticing people to come and work for you. At one stage probably five or 10 years ago we had ample workers, but now it is very hard to get people motivated to come and work for you, especially if you are in a small business. To take the impost off having to spend your money here and promoting your business and enticing people to come to work for you, as I said, is a really good thing.

Victoria will be the second state in the country to legislate the commercial stamp duty reform, with South Australia doing it back in 2018. When they abolished the stamp duty, that was it – they did not impose a commercial and industrial property tax on their people that own the properties, and it seems to have worked really well. The government say that we are going to have – and I know it is hard because we talk about it now, but it is going to be 2034 before it comes into action – that 1 per cent annual levy that is going to go on into the future, and I notice that in the amendments the Shadow Treasurer, the member for Sandringham, thought that instead of a flat rate of 1 per cent there should be a 0.8 per cent rate for business and commercial properties that are in the city and 0.4 per cent for regional properties, because there is a little bit of disparity between the city and the country. I know we now do have to pay stamp duty; we do get a 50 per cent rebate as such on our stamp duty at the moment. These are things that we need to look at to protect the investors that own these commercial properties. They are mums and dads virtually that have put in their hard-earned money and probably had these properties for a very long time.

As the member for Narracan said, there are properties that do sit there vacant, and we do need to move them on, so hopefully this may be a catalyst to do that. For younger people that are looking to get into commercial business – they may own a business themselves or they might just be trying to buy a commercial property – this might be the trigger moving forward that allows them to be able to do that, but we need to make sure that we have got all the checks and balances up to date.

The government has stated that up to \$50 billion in cumulative net present value will be generated over the next 40 years due to this reform, and we hope that is the case. Deloitte conducted the modelling to determine this figure. Their modelling assumes that removing stamp duty will see a greater quantum of property transactions, and as we said before, assuming that this may happen is one thing; seeing that it does happen is 10 years down the track into the future. As I said before, we are not opposing. We do support making it easier on the people that have these properties and on businesses that are actually trying to get themselves up and off the ground.

In the electorate of Morwell we do a lot within the power industry, and with renewables coming on board I think there are opportunities for infrastructure to be bought and sold, and land, to build some big assets on there to be part of the renewable transition. As I said before, small businesses really felt the brunt over the last few years, obviously going through COVID. There are a lot of businesses in the valley and right around regional Victoria, and I am sure here in Melbourne, that are feeling the pinch, that are doing it hard. We really feel for them. I know from my time as a small business owner the bills did not stop coming in; they just continued on every few months. You would have to keep up to pay your end-of-the-month stuff, then we would have all our taxes and everything like that come through.

One of the businesses that I have spoken to recently is Claudia's Cafe in Morwell. They are really struggling and feeling the pinch. Claudia is in hospitality. She has her coffee shop, and she has her regular clients. But it is coming to the crunch, unfortunately, where it is getting harder and harder at the end of each month for Claudia to make ends meet. She said that she has actually had to go and borrow money to start to pay some of her tax bills or, more to the point, go on payment plans that she has never ever had to before. It does make it really hard for these businesses. We wish them all the best, and we hope that they can get through to the other side and things become a lot easier for them.

As has been mentioned on our side a fair bit, with 53 new taxes that have been invoked across the journey, small business is really, really, really hurting. We can see merit in this bill, but we just want to know what it is going to be like moving forward. Is it going to be not a disaster but an impost on people that are trying to get their businesses up, trying to change commercial properties into the future? Will it be okay, and is this the best option? I know that we have had other people stand in the chamber and say that there is a lag up until this does come in and we see the benefits of it or the hidden gems that we have not foreseen yet. Hopefully, in that journey as we move along we can smooth and sort all those out, which will be excellent.

At the end of the day there are mums and dads that have obviously been in business for a very long time. There are a lot of older people that have been in business, and they might own these commercial properties. As they go to sell them to the up-and-coming generation, which is going to fly the flag and want to keep the dream alive of owning a small business and employing people in that business, that is a good thing. It is a very proud thing you can do, to own a business and actually employ others and give them the opportunity to work and earn money to pay their home loans off and to put their children through school, put a roof over their head and be able to be part of that community.

A lot of small businesses are the backbone of a lot of sporting fraternities and also all the Rotary clubs and Lions clubs around the place. They are the ones that are putting their hands in their pockets, so to be able to streamline this so they can put more money into their businesses is a good thing. As I said, we do not oppose it, but the member for Sandringham has moved reasoned and textual amendments. We commend the bill to the house. We hope that everything it sets out to do, it does. We wish all our small businesses good luck, and we commend the bill to the house.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:50): It is great to speak and rise on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024, an important bill in the context of reforms to stamp duty and support for businesses more broadly. I note the member for Morwell's comments around the member for Sandringham's reasoned amendment and will come to that in a moment and the sort of not-opposed position that they take. If you listened to the member for Bulleen or the member for

Brighton yesterday on the contribution, you would not know that they are not opposed. It was quite an impassioned plea of ranting awesomeness that they were putting forward. I wanted to address some of those things, particularly around the member for Bulleen's contribution. He talked about precinct structure plans (PSPs) and so many being approved under those opposite. It made me think of some of the really rushed planning decisions that were made. One particularly comes to mind in the member for Footscray's electorate, where literally you could have gravel and dirt out the front, multistorey buildings and no activation of community areas, and that was apparently a skyscraper that had been ticked off on and that people have to live in now, and we have to retrofit those outcomes.

When the member for Bulleen was talking about those skyscrapers in the air – 'It was so wonderful and I approved so many different areas' – I thought he was on a roll and I had better not interject, but every bit of me was just saying, 'Is there any awareness of what happened at Fishermans Bend?' The sirens were going off. Fishermans Bend was literally a rezone quickly done that benefited a lot of significant people who had connections to the coalition, and suddenly we had to go back when we came to government and buy sites for schools, for kinders, for retail support as well and community health services. It is one of the worst planning outcomes that planning will look into in the future and reflect on how not to do development, how not to build new precincts into the future. When the member for Bulleen was reflecting on that, I thought it was a spirited defence of his time as planning minister, but I can say this as well: anyone can colour in on a map, anyone can use multicolours and call that a PSP. The deep thinking comes from what infrastructure needs are required – the roads, the transport outcomes, not just one road in and one road out. Members on our side in government are now dealing with the ramifications of PSPs that were done between 2010 and 2014. We are dealing with the ramifications that are downstream to that and the undoing of developer contributions. It is easy to say you approved all these things, it is another to talk about the actual benefits.

Those opposite have also talked in the context of property and industrial changes and taxation, and in some of the things they have mentioned in taxation they have failed to mention in any of their contributions and speeches that Victoria is the engine room of the nation's economy. We have created since coming to government well over 700,000 jobs. The recent economic outlook and employment rates just a month and a half ago referenced here had the unemployment rate at 3.9 per cent; when we took government in 2014 we were dealing with 6.7 per cent. We had confidence near its lowest point. No-one was looking to Victoria to invest. It has taken a decade of aspiration and hope. We have seen the Victorian economy substantially grow. Our revenue base when we came to government – the last Napthine-Baillieu budgets were in the \$40 billion territory. Our economy has grown. The confidence has lifted up to over a \$90 billion budget that the Victorian economy is.

We lead the nation in so many areas, but one is in jobs aspiration and growth and investment attraction when we do not have the levers that other states have. We think of some of the mining states who have such a significant revenue base, the royalties that they can charge and the revenue that they can source. When you package that up, when you look at the delivery that we have provided, the jobs that we have created, the aspiration that has been achieved, it does not stack up to the attacks on where Victoria finds itself. It is okay to try to come up with five or six dot points and try to hold the line, but it falls apart really quickly where you do not have an alternative narrative, you do not have an alternative vision other than where debt has got to or where taxation is. There is no discussion. You cannot have a better budget circumstance by lowering the tax revenue base and then cutting services, which is what the coalition basically puts forward – spend less on services, take lower tax revenue. What is that? That is a substantial deficit for Victorians and a substantial impact. It is literally the same narrative that was put forward by those opposite when we went through the pandemic – literally, 'Just go budget bottom line. Don't think about the consequence on services or impacts on Victorians. That's all we're worried about. That's all we're focused on.'

That is a really poor narrative as we head towards the budget next week. When they do the lock-up and the Shadow Treasurer is there talking about the debt levels, the key questions that need to be put on the record are: what would have been done differently by the coalition during those areas of impact?

Would they have cost Victorian jobs, cost Victorian livelihoods and smashed businesses in the commercial and industrial space – from a lower debt base that would have seen communities absolutely smashed during that time? Is that the narrative? Because if the member for Sandringham criticises the interest number right now, then it does not stack up. What, then, are the projects that they would have stopped midstream that were so essential to Victoria's prosperity and outcomes?

It was not our former Premier Dan Andrews who said that when you are starting or moving through an infrastructure build and going through all of that you cannot stop midstream, and cost escalations are an eastern seaboard pressure. That was not the former Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk – no. That was one of the great Liberal heroes that they had so much hope and aspiration for: Dom Perrottet, the former Liberal Premier of New South Wales who acknowledged the significant cost escalations – and they have had a massive infrastructure program with train tunnels and road tunnels in New South Wales that are now being carried on by the Minns Labor government. When you look at that narrative, you do not see those criticisms from the member for Sandringham stacking up for more than 30 seconds. You cannot be a serious Shadow Treasurer and prospective government without seriously engaging in that policy thinking. You cannot front up and say, 'Oh, the debt's at that level.' 'What would you have done differently?' – 'Oh, it's all the government's problem. I don't actually have an answer today. We'll do a review.'

'We'll do a review' – that is the best that they have come up with in 10 years of opposition, a broad-based review, which would also see a bill that they are not opposed to under review as well. They are the key things around decision-making. What projects would they have done? What jobs would they have lost? What workers would they have sacked? What meals would they have taken off the table? What essential services in health, in education and early childhood would they have forgone, closed and cut to make sure that they would have a lower debt prism in an environment where we were seeing a one-in-100-year pandemic? If people are not asking those questions, and if the member for Sandringham and Shadow Treasurer's contributions on bills like this do not do that, then it is just a reheating. It is just a microwave dinner from last year. It is the same empty speech that we had last year over and over again. At least front up and give us something, because there will be a significant policy narrative and discussion from the Treasurer that talks about some of the complexities that we are seeing. Despite some of the geographical challenges that Victoria faces in terms of the revenue it can source, we are the cultural economic capital and sports and arts precinct of Australia. We punch above our weight internationally and we are the jobs and investment capital of the nation, and that is not changing. People will continue to invest in Melbourne and Victoria, and that will continue for many years to come.

It is investments and important policies and tax reforms like this that are a part of that narrative – not the cheap, scoreboard thing that they have tried to run. When a coalition member comes in and quotes the Peter Mitchell interview with the Premier in 2014 again – like a boring, reheated microwave dinner; we hear them go back through that again – you just go, 'Another one again. A position where they are not opposed.' They say that this is another tax. What an extraordinary thing. So they are in support of the tax reform but then say it is another example going forward again. It does not really make sense, the position that they have put forward.

The reasoned amendment that the member for Sandringham has put forward is almost just a running shopping list – frustratingly – to put on the record that they are opposed to something that they are actually not opposed to, once again. That some of the empty rhetoric here and some of the things they put forward cannot be quantified or do not have that tangible, deep policy thinking or basis, is written large in that reasoned amendment.

This is a really important bill on the transition, certainly for commercial and industrial precincts and their zonings into the future. Unlike the absolute rubbish that those opposite put forward around investment attraction, we are seeing more industrial estates go up, we are seeing more commercial precincts and we are seeing more investment in Victoria. It is the inverse of their narrative. It does not stack up, what they put forward, and Victoria will continue to be the engine room of our nation.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:00): I rise to contribute to the debate on this very special and interesting piece of legislation, the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. But before I do, I just want to shout out for a couple of events and a couple of days that have happened this year. I was hoping to get on my feet yesterday, but I just want to remind people that yesterday was May Day, International Workers Day, a day on which we remember the struggles of workers to gain basic rights and rally together to sustain those rights at work and in our communities. It is not just about 8 hours work, 8 hours sleep, 8 hours play; it is also about making sure that people get their rightful entitlements and get paid their rightful money.

There was another special day earlier in the week which I would like to mention, and that was International Workers Memorial Day on Monday. Many members from our side of the chamber attended the fantastic memorial service that the Victorian Trades Hall Council put on in the Carlton Gardens in Melbourne on Monday. Just to remind people, 55 workers have died through work accidents in the last 12 months and many thousands have been injured, so it was a very important day. It was pleasing to be there.

But I will come back to the bill. Following through on our 2023–24 budget promises to abolish stamp duty and replace it with a broad land-based tax directly benefiting our hardworking Victorian business owners and indirectly benefiting our communities in general, this reform is a progressive abolishment of land transfer duty for commercial and industrial properties. I know that many previous speakers have covered this, but this bill introduces a new principal act to bring in the implementation and administration of this reform. It also amends several existing acts to align them with the new tax framework. Those other acts that are affected are the Duties Act 2000, the Treasury Corporation of Victoria Act 1992, the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Valuation of Land Act 1960, the Heritage Act 2017, the Property Law Act 1958, the Retail Leases Act 2003 and finally the Sale of Land Act 1962.

The impact that these transformative reforms can have will be to the benefit of many thousands of commercial and industrial businesses right across the state but also in my electorate, which is fantastic. Importantly, it will open the door for so many more wishing to set up businesses and shops and things like that within the Melton electorate. I will not spend too much time on the minutiae of the written legislation, but I do want to put forward what this legislation will look like on the ground and in the streets of Melton. It is important not only to debate the merits of the bill but to show what it looks like to Victorians: our businesses expanding or setting up in the best location, somewhere, for example, that is closer to where their customers are – it is like going fishing where the fish are – and establishing a base where there is a growing workforce, like in central Melton. Certainly all the activity is going down in the Cobblebank area, with a new hospital, a new TAFE college, another secondary school and much housing going on, and down in the Exford area of Melton, which is the Melton South area. These are very fast-growing areas, not only with housing and things like that but also with infrastructure.

We are going to have another 50,000 people within the next 5½ years, which will bring it up to 250,000 people, and it is projected that there will be another 200,000 on top of that by 2050, so you can see the growth in that particular area. I know my colleagues in Kororoit, Tarneit and Point Cook are facing the same issues in regard to massive growth and population moving in, which is fantastic. They are so diverse, our communities, and we are so proud of those communities. The transition away from stamp duty makes it easier to establish a base among the fastest growing populations in the country such as mine and some of the other electorates that I mentioned. Of course it is great for the vibrancy of our communities and strengthening the economic vitality of the entire region, in particular right through the western suburbs.

It is estimated that the reforms could create up around 12,600 jobs and will increase Victoria's economy by around about \$50 billion over the next 40 years. Just recently, I think about two weeks ago, we had the Small Business Bus come into Melton, which was fantastic. They have been out there on a number of occasions, and this is just another way that the government helps to stimulate small

businesses and foster innovation. It incentivises and, as I say, encourages those Victorians who are willing to have a bit of a go and dip into their own pockets to try and start their own business and get some assistance and learn through the expertise of the people that are on the business bus and to develop their business ideas and build their capabilities, and I have had some direct involvement with that and with some of those businesses that have come from that.

We have what we call a hothouse pop-up in Melton, which is able to share with projects. The project is held once per year. It is fully funded by the Melton City Council for participants who qualify. It is coordinated by an organisation called Venture Melton, which is organised by the council. It is a business network supporting businesses in the mighty City of Melton and a big part of the retail activity, and it centres around strategies to help people within their local businesses. It runs five weeks of intensive training by highly experienced and qualified mentors followed by ongoing development and support from council to help accelerate the process of developing a business. Of course this project, which recently completed its fourth season, has seen something like 105 participants. That is potentially 105 businesses that have been set up through this process, through the expert mentoring, support and ideas for being able to run and formulate a business and hopefully keep a business viable and keep it going, and that is what has happened.

Again I say that these sorts of programs locally are very helpful, and we have contributed to that. I am the chair of the Melton Revitalisation Board, which has provided some money for these pop-up incubators for home businesses to be exposed to the general community of Melton. It has been very successful, and I will give a bit of a shout-out to a couple of those businesses that I went and saw when they were in the incubators. One is called Living KoKo, and they produce coffee and chocolate. It is one business –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Steve McGHIE: No, no invite. It was all for me. They are a great business. As I say, they produce coffee and chocolate – a fantastic business. I could not get away from that pop-up. They provide what they call slave-free certified cacao, and it is a vegan product too, which is interesting, especially for someone like me – the taste of it. They get their beans from slave-free Pacific Islanders, and that is great because we are engaging with other countries, our Pacific Island friends. We have a very big Pasifika community in Melton, and these products are just amazing. I encourage people to get onto their website. It is called Living KoKo. Have a look at it and order online. It is just magnificent – both their coffee and their chocolate and what they do for the local community.

But there is another one. There is a young guy that I want to give a shout-out to. His name is Jaslar Pearl. He is a young clothing designer. He is a 20-year-old young man, and his mother taught him how to sew at eight years of age. This guy produces all of these fantastic clothes. But for someone like me, when I went to the pop-up, the only thing I could pick out of his clothing that would suit me was a black T-shirt, so I got some T-shirts. But his clothing is beautiful, and I do encourage people to have a look at his website, called jaslarpearlstore.com. Again, this arises out of support for local businesses, improved tax reform and also the mentoring programs that our government has contributed to for local businesses to try and encourage more productivity within the area.

I know I have only got very little time left, but as I say, this is an important reform. I thank the Treasurer for this legislation and for this tax change. It is really important to businesses across the state and for the productivity of the state. But more importantly for me – I am going to be a bit selfish – it is really important for my electorate of Melton, for the local businesses of Melton, and we keep encouraging those businesses. I commend it to the house.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (16:10): I rise to speak on the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024. This is a bill that is all about abolishing stamp duty on commercial and industrial properties and replacing it with a more efficient annual tax, based on unimproved land value, to be known as the commercial and industrial property tax. At federal, state or local level, the

Labor movement has long been committed to a progressive tax system where the burden of taxation aligns with the capacity of corporations, businesses or individuals to pay in a fair and equitable manner.

That is why since 2014 we have been committed to a tax system that is efficient, effective and as balanced as possible, including through the introduction of a number of keynote taxation reforms which, along with this bill before us today, are designed to drive economic and jobs growth and increase the payroll tax threshold to better support small businesses. From 1 July 2024 we are raising the tax-free threshold from \$700,000 to \$900,000, with a further increase to \$1 million in July 2025. This will save 26,000 Victorian businesses up to \$14,550 per year, and around 6000 of those businesses will stop paying payroll tax altogether. We are abolishing business insurance duties, becoming the first state in Australia to do so, with the rate of insurance duty on fire and industrial risk, public and product liability, professional indemnity, employers liability and marine and aviation insurance to be reduced by 1 per cent each year from July 2024, saving businesses around \$3200 on professional indemnity insurance and \$2400 on fire and other special risks over 10 years.

We are also making it easier to start and run a small business in Victoria through our \$38 million regulatory reform agenda, which I have previously spoken on, which is all about driving business investment and growth by cutting red tape and streamlining licensing approvals and processes. We have established economic growth in Victoria, led by the commissioner for economic growth, established to drive the next wave of growth-boosting reforms in this state. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Minister for Small Business for all her passionate and diligent work in this space as well.

Along with these measures, other keynote initiatives we have introduced that will continue supporting economic, business and jobs growth have included the landmark Big Build program, creating game-changing opportunities for local businesses, suppliers, workers and apprentices; free TAFE, providing more than 80 free courses to over 170,000 Victorians in the sectors of skills needs; and of course free kinder for three- and four-year-olds, which will deliver benefits for many, many decades to come. When combined, these measures have all helped to create the positive economic environment to drive record jobs and growth across this state. Since 2014 our economy has generated 800,000 new jobs, including more than 170,000 in regional Victoria. When the pandemic hit our shores in 2020, we invested to protect livelihoods and established a target to create 400,000 jobs by 2025, and we have far exceeded this goal, well ahead of schedule, with employment rising by more than 560,000 workers since September 2020. In my own community of Merri-bek, when we came to government in 2014 unemployment under the Liberals was just over 8 per cent. As of 2023, under this Labor government, unemployment had significantly reduced to just on 3.8 per cent and has consistently had a '3' in front of it.

It is this bill that is currently before us in the house that will continue helping us to drive this investment, business and jobs growth across the state. It is a bill that will reform the taxation landscape for commercial and industrial property in Victoria by moving away from stamp duty and towards a more efficient tax. I am honoured to be part of the very first Victorian government in history with a plan to abolish stamp duty on commercial and industrial properties in this state. Replacing stamp duty on property purchased with a broad-based land tax has long been supported by a wide range of independent think tanks, policy commentators, industry groups and parliamentary inquiries. This is a transformational reform. It is not a simple adjustment to tax settings; it is a different way of taxing commercial and industrial property that will support businesses to grow and expand. It will make it easier for businesses to expand or set up in their best location – for example, closer to their customers or where they want to ascertain a growing and more skilled workforce.

Economic modelling suggests that after 40 years this reform will have added at least 12,600 jobs to the Victorian economy and have increased the size of the Victorian real economy by up to \$50 billion in net present value terms – \$50 billion. The new tax will apply to commercial and industrial property transactions with both the contract and settlement date on or after 1 July 2024. For these properties stamp duty will be paid one final time on the property if and when it is transacted, and the new annual

commercial and industrial property tax will be payable 10 years after the final stamp duty payment regardless of whether that property has been transacted again. If a property is sold again, stamp duty will not apply if the property continues to be used for commercial or industrial purposes. For the smooth transition to the new tax system the government will give purchasers of commercial or industrial property who meet the eligibility criteria the option of accessing a government-facilitated transition loan as an alternative to self-financing the up-front stamp duty amount. In this way eligible purchasers who choose the transition loan option will transition to an annual repayment from the time of the purchase, freeing up capital for businesses that they can use to invest in expanding or employing more workers. The commercial and industrial property tax will also be set at a flat 1 per cent of the property's unimproved land value rate, with no complicated rate schedules or thresholds. The reform will not apply to a number of ineligible businesses.

Currently when you buy or acquire a commercial or industrial property in Victoria, you pay land transfer duty, also called stamp duty, and stamp duty adds to the cost of purchasing a property. When applied to commercial and industrial properties, it discourages businesses from investing, expanding or relocating their operations, impeding growth in their productivity. Reforming stamp duty has been recommended, as I said, by numerous inquiries, such as from the Henry tax review, the Productivity Commission and even the Grattan Institute. Replacing stamp duty with this commercial and industrial property tax will encourage businesses to expand to a better location, support businesses to invest in buildings and infrastructure and promote the efficient use of commercial and industrial land.

Acting Speaker Lambert, the commercial and industrial sectors, as you can appreciate being the member for Preston, play a vitally important role in supporting economic prosperity across the north, including my municipality of Merri-bek. Many of our local businesses – 16,000 businesses in total – are actually associated with the commercial and industrial sectors and overall, when combined, help generate \$7 billion in local gross regional product and help support just under 50,000 locally based jobs. Some of these key commercial and industrial businesses that are based out of my local community include construction businesses, which make up 16 per cent of businesses; professional, scientific and technical services, which make up 14.2 per cent; transport, postal and warehousing businesses, which make up 13.5 per cent; retail traders, making up 7.2 per cent; accommodation and food services, 5.3 per cent; admin and support services, 4.8 per cent; and manufacturing, 3.2 per cent, amongst many others. By removing a key barrier to more effective investments into commercial and industrial sectors via the removal of stamp duty, the benefits will multiply across the economy and across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West. Looking just at the change in tax revenue over the budget and forward estimates period, businesses will be paying around \$260 million less in stamp duty over the next four years as a result of this reform. This will help to unlock and encourage more commercial and industrial development across my electorate.

According to North Link, the peak body representing and advocating for the economic and job interests across Melbourne's north, our region is home to one in five Melburnians. It is on track to rise to 1.5 million local residents by 2036, roughly the size of Adelaide. North Link talks about advocating for and leveraging the strategic opportunities of the north to attract more commercial and industrial investment, given the fact that we are on Melbourne's CBD doorstep and are the gateway to regional Victoria. There is our proximity to Melbourne Airport, Essendon Airport and even Avalon Airport; our key freeways – the Hume Freeway, the Metropolitan Ring Road, the Calder Freeway, the Eastern Freeway and the future North East Link; our range of local educational institutions – La Trobe Uni national innovation cluster, La Trobe Uni Bundoora precinct, Kangan Batman TAFE in Broadmeadows, Melbourne Polytechnic in Preston, RMIT in Brunswick and much more. We are home to a number of key jobs precincts – CSL in Broadmeadows and Parkville, the Northern Hospital precinct, the Austin Hospital and Parkville health precincts, and the Brunswick Business Incubator. By leveraging these we can help create the jobs of the future.

My community of course is the spiritual home, in many ways, of manufacturing in Melbourne's north. We were home to the former Kodak factory, Yakka on Lygon Street, Lincoln Mills milliners, one of

the biggest milliners in the Southern Hemisphere during its time, and the defence force clothing and textile factory on Gaffney Street. However, today, as set out by North Link:

Coburg activity precinct has great potential to be a major jobs hub for white collar, food and advanced manufacturing, health and creative industries. It includes two distinct zones: Coburg Activity Centre and Coburg North Industrial Areas at both Newlands Road and northwest of Batman Train Station ...

which are adjoined by many underutilised parcels of industrial and commercial sites.

Coburg Activity Centre has recently grown as a result of the major investment in the redevelopment of the former Pentridge Prison site. The Bell and Moreland level crossing ...

projects and much more.

However, the centre of Coburg remains underutilised and there are substantial Merri-bek City Council landholdings in the precinct that will support future redevelopment and investment.

The Coburg North Newlands Road Industrial Area –

in particular –

is home to a growing food cluster including several medium size enterprises.

These businesses are supported by purpose built industrial accommodation, which provides them with the space and facilities they need to operate ...

There is also a strong and growing number of creative and cultural businesses, supporting over 1,000 creative and cultural sector jobs, in the Coburg Activity Precinct.

Overall there is potential for \$3.6 billion in economic output per annum and almost 10,000 new jobs to be created in central Coburg if much of this under-utilised commercial and industrial land is maximised into the future. In that respect I genuinely do commend this bill to the house. From my perspective it is very much all about unlocking that potential for central Coburg, which I am sure many of you appreciate I am very passionate about and look forward to pursuing.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (16:20): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (16:21): Different day, different outfit, but I will continue on from where I left off. The national scheme ensures consistency across the country when it comes to dealing with retailer failures. It ensures that customers will continue to receive electricity or gas without disruption even if their retailer goes under. Crucially, in the case of gas this bill gives the Australian Energy Regulator the power to step in and direct the failed retailer's gas contracts and supply to the retailer that takes on the affected customers. This ensures that the retailer has enough gas to service its new, larger customer base, bridging a gap in Victoria where the Essential Services Commission does not have the equivalent powers and the Victorian retailers of last resort could have insufficient capacity to service customers. Through this bill we are making sure that Victorians can keep their hot water going and keep cooking even if their retailer goes down. This bill also allows for the transfer of affected customers to multiple new retailers, so it is not just one retailer that shoulders the burden. The bill includes better financial protection for affected customers as well; currently there is a one-time fee imposed on customers of the failed retailers, but with this bill those costs will be spread across a wider

consumer base. We are making things fairer for Victorians no matter what happens in the energy market.

Members opposite have a far less impressive record on energy, which we are well across on this side of the chamber. They privatised Victoria's energy network, leaving Victorians to fend for themselves. Disconnections doubled, retail electricity prices increased by 34.1 per cent from 2010 to 2014 and people were left with no power and no heating. But when we took office in 2014 we promised to make energy fairer and more affordable for Victorians. Just as the opposition's record speaks for itself, so too does ours. Through this government's actions – through our nation-leading renewable energy targets and investments – Victoria has the lowest wholesale power prices in the national market. We are not stuck in the past, clinging to outdated sources of power and warmth; we are moving forward every day.

Because of this, Victorians are paying less on their energy bills – we know this. The new draft Victorian default offer shows an average 6.4 per cent decrease in electricity bills for residential customers – that is an average saving of \$112. That is money back in the pockets of Victorians. 360,000 Victorian households are on the default offer and will see this direct bill saving. They will get it. We have not forgotten small businesses either; under the draft offer they will save \$266, a 7 per cent decrease at a time when they need it most.

And, yes, this reduction in energy bills can be attributed to our investment in renewable energy. It is being driven primarily by lower wholesale energy costs, because this government is investing in the technology of the future. The Victorian default offer is lower than the average market offer around the country. We created it to put money back, as I said, in the pockets of Victorians, where it belongs. As I noted earlier, Victorians are also saving money through the Solar Homes and Victorian energy upgrades programs. We are helping them access renewable energy and more energy efficient products around their homes, reducing their power bills and keeping their homes warm – or cool – and running. By reducing energy use we reduce wholesale and network costs. These costs typically make up two-thirds of a retail bill, so by reducing wholesale and network costs we are reducing bills for Victorians. On average we know that households and businesses that undertake energy efficiency upgrades on their properties under this program save \$110 and \$3700 respectively. Again, that is money in people's pockets. The Solar Homes program is going so well – over 320,000 total installs of solar panels, batteries and hot water systems so far, including over a quarter of a million solar panels installed. We are saving households thousands a year on power, and again, that is money back in people's pockets.

In conclusion – I am going to finish up a little early, maybe to get into a different outfit – this government is taking another step, a positive step, a forward-planning step, in our energy journey with this bill by protecting Victorians in the retail energy market when times get tough. This is just another example of how the Allan Labor government delivers real reforms to support consumers when they need it most and make sure they get the best possible deal from the energy system.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:26): It is an absolute pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. As we have heard throughout some great contributions on this side of the house, it is an essential piece of legislation that will enhance protections for Victorian consumers and strengthen the resilience of the energy market. This bill marks a significant step towards safeguarding the interests of energy consumers in the face of an evolving and at times very challenging energy landscape. When I say 'evolving' – I note that the responsible minister is at the table, the Minister for Energy and Resources – I just want to put on the record the ambitious target Victoria has as the first state in the nation to level ourselves with the expectations of the Paris agreement, and that is reaching 75 to 80 per cent below 2005 levels of carbon emissions by 2035 and net zero emissions by 2045.

The bill adopts the national retailer of last resort scheme in Victoria, which is provided for in the National Energy Retail Law. The retailer of last resort scheme is a key consumer safeguard designed

to transfer customers to alternate energy retailers should their current provider fail in the market, and obviously it is based on an older South Australian piece of legislation.

I have listened really intently to this debate. It is not, I would say, a hobby of mine, but certainly it is an interest of mine to listen to what people in the community and people in the opposition are talking about when they talk about energy and when they talk about renewables. I would say it has been a fairly robust but sensible conversation, but it does seem to me that there is always a barrier. On the other side of the table there are plenty of people that I think are progressive in their thoughts about the evolution of changing to new and clean energy resources, but for some others there does always seem to be a barrier they put in place. When we talk about the Liberals DNA, this is that optic.

For example, and this was only a couple of days ago, we have got Mr Littleproud, a federal member, saying that regions are at saturation point and cannot cope with more wind or solar. A person by the name of Andrew Blakers wrote an article for the *Conversation*, dated 29 April 2024, and his article was titled 'No threat to farmland: just 1200 square kilometres can fulfil Australia's solar and wind needs'. Mr Littleproud has said we cannot have any more wind or solar farms or transmission lines in Australia; we are at saturation point. This author has done the sums, and he said:

When we switch completely to solar and wind, do we have the space for all the panels, turbines and power lines?

And it is an interesting question, because we do hear a lot of rhetoric about these things, but sometimes these issues are too large for one person to find the data or do the research to get the solution. Mr Blakers has done the sums, and he has come up with the data that all we need is 1200 square kilometres to fully decarbonise Australia with solar and wind. That is not much. The area devoted to agriculture is about 3500 times larger at 4.2 million square kilometres. The area of land that would be taken away from agriculture works out at about 4.5 square metres per person, or about the size of a living room, so there is one debunked statement that was made the other day. Perhaps we have taken it the wrong way. Perhaps we have perceived it differently, but from what I read that has been debunked quite thoroughly.

We have also got at a more local level the barriers put in place by the former or failed candidate for Dunkley recently. I think he is a smart guy, and I think he knows that there is such thing as climate change. I think he knows that renewables are something that he needs to consider and that Frankston council needs to consider. But the thing that shocked me and I think shocked the whole electorate, indeed some in Victoria, was not the comment about sleeping with a baseball bat under the pillow but more that the candidate could not discount a nuclear reactor in Dunkley. There is a lot of research that needs to go on here, and there is a lot of misinformation that is floating around. I will get to that, because it really is something people need to consider. This brain – I was going to swear then, sorry. This silly policy of saying we should go nuclear is just outrageous, and it is based on very, very little fact. We have got people talking about that they cannot discount nuclear in Dunkley, and I know the member for Nepean is having a conniption fit now because he is not for nuclear. I can see it in his eyes.

These are small nuclear reactors or small modular reactors. They are around the world. They come from a place of driving submarines. I think the Russians even tried to power an aircraft, a strategic bomber, at one stage during the Cold War with one, which would be in the air the whole time. Submarines, ships – I think the Russians out in the tundra have got lighthouses that are powered by them, and these things are deteriorating so badly now that people are getting poisoned and dying. That is the nature of these things. They are high waste, they are low gigawatt and they are very costly financially. It takes a long time to build them.

The one thing we have got to think about at the moment is the security of a small modular reactor. We do not have to talk about international terrorism; we can talk about domestic terrorism in the state, and there are some people who would be tempted to do very nasty things. I think the one thing we need to consider now, apart from every other negative that comes with an SMR, is how do we keep these things secure? How do we keep them secure from people that would wish us harm? It seems to me

that some of the opposition, through what they have been saying, know the cost of everything, but they know the value of nothing or they know the investment of nothing. The renewable energy revolution is something they are part of right now. They are part of it. Every time they ride a tram, that is solar energy. Every time they switch on their lights, increasingly that will be renewable.

I have got no issue with healthy scepticism. I am a sceptic myself – just ask the person that came into my office the other day and was complaining about people listening to him with 5G. I am a sceptic of that. But what I see from the opposition at times is scepticism, and I get a little bit worried because I was always taught when I was a teacher that the learning begins when you put your ego aside. I think we need to change that to ‘the progress begins when you put your politics aside’ for this one. We are already doing the heavy lifting on renewables, and as I said before, this state is leading the nation in the fact that we have aligned ourselves with the Paris agreement targets, which is no mean feat.

As far as this bill goes, it is designed as a fail-safe in a lot of ways when we have those natural disasters. I have heard some people even talking about Black Saturday and fires during this conversation. I am not sure what happened on Black Saturday with those breakers on different poles and whatnot should come into this conversation. But the bill is designed to make sure that people have a consistent source of energy and that, whether it be floods, whether it be storms or whether it be any other kind of natural disaster, people are able to be plugged into the grid.

As I have said before, I think what is frustrating some people in this conversation is the vigour and eagerness of those in opposition now to say, ‘No, no, we believe in climate change’ – which is great, because previously we had people, especially in the other place, who were vehemently against science. You know, ‘One scientist out of 99 says it doesn’t exist, so it doesn’t exist.’ We have dragged them kicking and screaming to science, which is just like magic, but it is real. I think now we have got to accept that we have this problem, and now we both agree with it, come along with us for the journey. Let us go on the journey together. It will be better for Victorians if we can have a productive, pragmatic relationship. It has been interesting to hear some of that, I think, coming through on the other side – some real positivity, some real factual conversations – but there still do seem to be the sticks in the mud. This bill is a good one. I thoroughly endorse it and I commend it to the house.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (16:36): I rise to contribute to the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024. This bill certainly is another reform that our government is making to protect Victorians in that retail market. I have spoken in this place several times on various bills that are energy related and on the topic of renewables particularly and the SEC. It probably speaks to the amount of work that we are doing in this place, having to speak on so many bills in this space. I know the minister is here in the chamber today. We are doing so much, and I would like to point out the amount of work. I am not only very proud to be part of a government and to work behind a minister who is ambitious for our state – we have achieved so much already, and there is a lot to continue to do – but proud we are a government that has got on with it, with consumers and Victorians at the centre of our reforms. That is what our reforms have been about. They are about our consumers. They are about our Victorians having the better deal for them.

The fact is we are bringing back the SEC. It is a really exciting part of our energy transition. We are building our renewables and building our batteries, our storage, and indeed when I look around the country I do believe that we are leading in this space. This bill marks a significant step towards that safeguard, like I have talked about. The best interests of our consumers are at heart in this energy landscape. It is a complex landscape, and it is ever evolving, but this bill particularly is there to provide a national retailer of last resort, and that is a scheme for Victoria. This bill applies to parts of the National Energy Retail Law in Victoria. We have our own energy retail laws, and they are regulated by the Essential Services Commission, and those Victorian retail energy laws are, as I said, tailored to benefit Victorian consumers. This last resort scheme is really a way to give consumers those protection measures that are needed. It aims to transition customers to alternative energy providers in the event that their current one collapses in the market. It has that primary goal of ensuring stability and guaranteeing uninterrupted electricity or gas supply for our consumers. Unlike other jurisdictions

where energy retail laws are regulated by the National Energy Retail Law and monitored by the Australian Energy Regulator, Victoria does maintain its own regulatory framework, and that, like I have said, is enforced by the Essential Services Commission. Victoria does have some of the strongest energy consumer protections in this country, and that will indeed continue.

In the last eight years we have done some incredible work in this space and what I would say has in the past been deemed impossible by others. I do love a moment of 'told you so', but this certainly is a moment where we can celebrate the ambitious targets we have reset but also celebrate the achievements that we have achieved in government in a really short amount of time. We had a federal government that wasted decades in this space. We did not have a federal partner. We had constituents saying to us they wanted action on climate change, they wanted action in the energy space, they wanted reduction of emissions, and we wasted at a national level 10 years. Thankfully we do have that partner now in Canberra that is certainly willing to be a really strong partner with us in the work that we are doing.

We have not only embraced our renewable energy, though; we have more than tripled the share of renewables in power generation. We are leading that transition, but we also know that we want to put – excuse the pun – power back in the hands of the Victorian people as well. And they have done that. They have put solar on their roofs. They have been able to do that to reduce their bills. They are embracing that clean energy, and many households now are also turning to looking at batteries and electric vehicles, and the technology keeps improving as we do that transition.

Really great for the Geelong region and Victoria – but I will proudly say it is in the Geelong region – is the Victorian Big Battery. It is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and it does symbolise that transition that we are having, the innovation and the determination. I was interested to see that the footprint of that big battery is just under the size of the GMHBA Stadium at Kardinia Park – so two great things in Geelong, the Geelong Football Club and the Victorian Big Battery, with a very similar footprint. But yes, it is a great space to be – there is a lot of energy from that ground as well.

We also know that this type of investment is about the energy, but it is also about driving down our emissions. It is about slashing those greenhouse gas emissions, and we are doing that here in Victoria as well. We have set targets, but we have actually met them and done more. We have comfortably surpassed our 2020 renewable energy target of 20 per cent, and then we increased our 2030 renewable target from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. We are not shy of setting ambitious targets for ourselves.

We have talked about the large-scale battery, but we also know that we need to do at a local level some small community and neighbourhood batteries. Proudly, four of those neighbourhood batteries will come to my electorate, in the Borough of Queenscliffe. It is going to be an exciting project. I went along to a community forum where the community could learn more about the investment that is coming. We are partnering with Mondo Energy, the borough and a group called Queenscliffe Climate Action Now, and the community have really been the drivers of this transition for their own local communities. Proudly, we are going to be investing in these four neighbourhood batteries to allow more solar in the area, to soak up that solar, to store it locally and to really have those benefits at a local level, so it is a really exciting project. I said to the community on the night that they are really leading this transition at a local level. They are on this journey. There are still things to work out in terms of seeing the long-term benefits, but they are willing to give this a go. They are willing to say, 'We want to lead in this space.' So it is a really exciting time for that community.

Just on the solar and batteries, another exciting project, again driven by the community, was under the greener government school buildings program. We were able to partner also with the local primary school, the climate action group, the borough and the Queenscliff Music Festival with a really generous donation from them to put 74 solar panels, which is a 30-kilowatt system, on the school roof. That has been able to support the school to reduce their own energy bills but also feed that solar into the neighbourhood batteries that will come to the town. So this really has been a collective effort where

government and communities come together and say, 'Look, this is what we want to achieve,' and it is supported by community organisations, and then we can get on with the work that we are doing.

This bill is vitally needed in a world where energy is our everyday life. We need energy in all our daily lives, and it is imperative that we really safeguard that when we have adverse outcomes within the market. Imagine a scenario where you now no longer have energy. Your provider has failed. You need to access power. It can be chaotic and very much an inconvenience to families. That is where this retailer of last resort scheme will step in. For years Victoria has operated a successful scheme, but as we are doing this transition, as we are seeing the markets change, we have seen that turbulent energy sector, so that is why this bill is so important. We know that bringing back the SEC was one of the biggest things at the last election. We talked about putting the power back into Victorian hands, where privatised companies and greed are not the drivers of an essential service like power. We as a government knew that we had to remove that privatisation and put it back into government hands, and I am really proud that we have done this. This bill is another example of this government delivering real reforms in the energy sector. We make reforms that put consumers at the centre, and we ensure that Victorians are getting the best deal from our energy system. We will continue to lead the nation in this space.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (16:46): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, yet another piece of important legislative reform from the Allan Labor government that has been brought to this place in recent months. From the outset I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Energy and Resources here at the table for her leadership in this space and indeed her entire team's work to make this package of energy reforms happen. Our reform agenda in the energy space has been as bold as it has been expansive, and it would not be possible without the power of work put in by the minister, her advisers and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

Make no mistake about it, our record on energy speaks for itself. We are world leaders when it comes to the renewables transition. Since coming to government we have tripled the share of renewable power generation, not by accident but by strong intervention from our Labor government into the energy market, pulling all the levers to accelerate our transition from dirty, unreliable fossil fuels. We have held the country's largest reverse auctions of renewable capacity, installed the largest battery in the Southern Hemisphere, just mentioned by the member for Bellarine – go Cats! – and supported 300,000 Victorian households with rebates to supercharge the uptake of rooftop solar. The results are clear. We smashed through our 2020 renewable energy target of 20 per cent, and we are well on track to meet our future targets. That is exactly why we committed to going even further in the lead-up to the 2022 state election, with our 2030 renewable energy target raised from 50 per cent to 65 per cent, and by 2035, 95 per cent of generation will be sourced from renewables. It is ambitious, and thanks to the Allan Labor government we are getting on and making it a reality, not with words but with tangible action.

We know that right now the private multinationals, which have made billions of dollars off the backs of Victorian families and businesses, are getting up and leaving. That is an unmistakable fact. Their coal-fired power plants are getting old and breaking down, so they are packing their bags and they are leaving the market. It is why we as a government are stepping in and bringing back the State Electricity Commission, the body those opposite sold off back in the 1990s in the depths of Kennett's privatisation era. It is a government-owned energy company that is investing billions of dollars into 100 per cent renewable energy across our great state.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, Jeff Kennett did not start the privatisation. It was Joan Kirner.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Nathan Lambert): There is no point of order.

John MULLAHY: In doing so, there are three things that the new SEC is accomplishing. Firstly, it is supercharging our renewable energy transition, investing in more projects and more capacity in the system. Secondly and consequently, it is going to drive down the power bills of Victorian households and businesses, because more supply of renewable energy means lower prices. Of course as a by-product of our investment it is supporting the creation of thousands of great union jobs across Victoria, including for traineeships and apprentices. I know there is a power of work underway to establish the SEC centre of training excellence. The three things – more renewables, cleaner energy prices and quality union jobs – are a huge win for Victoria.

We are seeing it in action, with the latest prices of the Victorian default offer down 6.4 per cent for Victorian families and 7 per cent for Victorian businesses, driven by cheaper supply from reliable renewable energy. Not only that, but the Victorian default offer is 16 per cent lower than the average default market offer and lower than the national default offer too. Long story short, it means more money back in the pockets of hundreds of thousands of Victorian households and businesses as a direct consequence of the investments in renewables from the Allan Labor government. It is very simple and, dare I say, not like splitting atoms.

Victorians are big fans of our bold energy policy agenda. I heard that at the doors out in Glen Waverley during the last election campaign, and I continue to hear it loud and clear when I engage with constituents on their doorsteps and at the train stations too – what we should be doing in this place for the Victorian community. I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government that leads with that principle, and it is the principle that applies to this piece of legislation before the house today. It is all about protecting Victorian families and businesses from the failure of the market, because when retailers collapse, Victorians should not have to bear the consequences and be cut off from the energy they need. That is what this bill is about.

Since 2007 we have had the retailer of last resort scheme. That has worked well to ensure customers of failed retailers have been quickly transitioned to another retailer, thus avoiding disruption to their energy supply. But with an increasingly complex market, we are committed to making the retailer of last resort scheme stronger. This bill adopts the national retailer of last resort scheme here in Victoria, providing a uniform and consistent framework for managing the collapses of retailers. What does that actually mean? Well, here in Victoria we have our own energy regulations managed and enforced by the Essential Services Commission, ensuring Victoria has some of the strongest consumer protections in Australia. But other states and territories have energy retail laws that are regulated by the National Energy Retail Law and monitored by the Australian Energy Regulator.

This bill takes parts of the National Energy Retail Law and applies them to the Victorian regulatory system. More specifically, we are giving the Australian Energy Regulator the powers that the Essential Services Commission does not have – namely, the ability to provide extra energy to the energy retailers of last resort. For example, if a Glen Waverley family buys their gas from a retailer that goes bust, not only will the Australian Energy Regulator have the power to seamlessly transfer the family over to the retailer of last resort, but it will also be able to provide that retailer of last resort with the extra gas it needs to supply that Glen Waverley family. We know that when energy retailers have gone bust in the past, retailers of last resort have suddenly found themselves needing to supply a significant number of new customers at very short notice. It is all about ensuring supply is maintained, which is a win for consumers. It is an important piece of legislation and will go a long way to ensuring that we have the best possible consumer protections in place for Victorian families and businesses, especially in situations where energy retailers go belly up.

On this side of the chamber we are about getting on and delivering tangible benefits for the Victorian community. If you will indulge me, the contrast could not be sharper in comparing our record to that of those opposite. When the Victorian Liberals last sat on these benches, electricity prices increased 34 per cent and disconnections doubled to almost 60,000. They dumped Victoria's energy reduction target, they all but banned wind farms, with the strictest planning laws in the country, and in their last budget they slashed funding to the energy and resources portfolio by almost 20 per cent.

While their record is clear, so is ours. We are leading the world with the transition to net zero, faster than leaders like Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg and Canada. We have more than tripled the amount of renewables generated in Victoria, and we are well on track to reach 95 per cent renewables by 2035. We have brought back the State Electricity Commission, which is investing \$1 billion in renewable projects, and as a result default offer bills are coming down by 6.4 per cent for Victorian families in the new financial year. I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government that is believing in the climate science, taking action and delivering results for the Victorian community, and I commend this bill to the house.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (16:53): I am so proud to rise to speak to this bill, the National Energy Retail Law (Victoria) Bill 2024, in the presence of our fantastic minister, the Minister for Climate Action, who is bringing about this excellent transition for our state to renewable energy. I am very happy to be speaking about this this afternoon. We do have the fantastic minister here, but I would like to quote another leader in the space of this transition to renewables. I would like to quote somebody who said:

We want a greener power supply, a future for our children, less reliance on coal and sustainable renewables ...

Of course I quote the member for Ovens Valley, and I am so glad that the member for Ovens Valley is on board with this transition. He must be one of our strongest supporters and is a brave man to speak up amongst the benches of those opposite. But he is not the only one opposite to have an excellent idea. We heard from the member for Mildura. She went to France, and she came back with a great idea. She said we should put solar panels on roofs and have batteries where they are needed. *Sacré bleu!* We are already doing that in this state. We have solar panels on our schools. We have solar panels on the museum – maybe not whatever the museum over there is called, but the Melbourne Museum. We have got solar panels, and even the Melbourne market is talking about the massive space that they have for solar panels. But I do thank her for her contribution to that – and the greener schools program as well – some great contributions from those opposite. If they ever want to further their support for this amazing work that we are doing under our amazing minister, we are happy for them to get on board. It is good that they are speaking. We almost do not have to speak on this side, because to be honest our record speaks for itself. What we have done speaks for itself. The transition to renewables is upon us, and they seem to be coming along now for the ride. I really hope it is true.

It is not by accident, this amazing transition progress that we have made, going above and beyond our own already ambitious targets, and what this boils down to is: it is not about us. I know we do like to talk about our achievements in this space, but I think one of the things we are most proud of is that the work that we are doing is bringing down power bills for Victorians. We know that for a lot of Victorians the discussion about this relates mostly to the hip pocket, and we absolutely understand. We all have had the experience of a power bill that brings us a bit of shock. We have had constituents contact us with difficulties with their bills. We know that with the work to transition to renewables, the reduction in power bills for people is what makes them stand up and take notice, so I am really glad that those opposite are starting to stand up and take notice as well of the work that we are doing.

There are facts to back that up, when we talk about the lower costs. The average Victorian default offer is 16.2 per cent lower than the average default market offer. That is real savings for people in cost-of-living difficulties. That makes a real difference to their lives, so that is what drives us. That is what gives us the passion to keep working hard and to continue with that transition. We know that there is fearmongering from those opposite. We heard from the member for Euroa that people that live in regional areas will be without power because they will not be able to have gas. Nobody is taking anyone's gas away.

A member interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: Oh, you are awake, I am so glad. That is correct if somebody would like to build a new home. What makes it remarkable is that their own communities, the people that they represent – do they not want them to have cheaper power bills? I would have thought that they would

want their constituents to be supported to have the option of electric and gas. I thought that they would want cheaper power bills for the people that they represent. Unfortunately, it seems that they would prefer fearmongering and mischief-making rather than the honest good work of this government, bringing down power prices and moving us to cleaner, greener renewable energy for the children that the member for Ovens Valley speaks of.

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

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Tim Pallas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Brad Rowswell'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 commits to:

- (1) further consultation on the proposed CIPT rate including the cost neutrality of the proposed reforms and how the reforms will affect owners of regional and non-regional commercial and industrial properties;
- (2) providing investors with certainty and confidence against any potential future tax increases; and
- (3) making public the modelling assumptions underpinning the \$50 billion economic uplift anticipated from this reform scheme and the rationale for the risk margin component of the proposed 10-year transitional government loan, including any future changes made to the risk margin component of the loan rate'.

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Sandringham 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 moved by the member for Sandringham should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy,

Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner

Question agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

The SPEAKER: As the required statement of intention has been made under section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act 1975, the third reading of this bill must be passed by an absolute majority. As there are no voices for the noes and there are more than 45 members present in the chamber, I declare the third reading passed with the concurrence of an absolute majority of the whole number of the members of the Legislative Assembly.

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.

Read third time.

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

Rulings from the Chair

Unparliamentary language

The SPEAKER (17:08): During members statements this morning the member for Bulleen spoke about an issue affecting his constituents. Near the end of his remarks the member posed some rhetorical questions in a manner that alleged other members were racist and hated particular groups in the community. While the comments were addressed to a collective and therefore did not seek to impugn other members individually, I find that allegations of racism and that other members hate some ethnic groups to be unparliamentary and they do reflect very poorly on the house. This is particularly acute during members statements as there is no question before the Chair and other members cannot then refute the comments as they would in a substantive debate. I caution members about using such phrases in the house. Members need to find another way to express their views and comply with the requirements of standing orders 118, 119 and 120.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Patient transport

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:09): (631) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that the minister increase funding for the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme so that residents of my electorate are not put at further disadvantage in regard to accessing suitable specialist health care. The Victorian patient transport assistance scheme, or VPTAS, has been helping Mildura residents to offset the costs associated with travel and accommodation when accessing specialist medical treatment that cannot be provided locally. And that list is growing, given the lack of specialists in Mildura, which is the majority of specialist services. However, a review of VPTAS guidelines and payments has threatened to make it even harder for regional and rural patients to access these services. We know that this is on the horizon, particularly in regard to taxi and air travel reimbursement, which the Department of Health says is reaching non-sustainable levels.

I ask the minister what the alternative may be. Given we have no passenger rail services, air travel is the only means, apart from a V/Line bus that leaves at 4 am and is unsuitable for those suffering from

debilitating and terminal illnesses – people who need specialist care, and not in a good way, and are unable to get on the V/Line bus at 4 am. It is not uncommon for flights from Mildura to Melbourne to be in excess of \$1000, and we anticipate that will get worse with the Bonza situation. Like I said, with no train and no public transport servicing the Mildura Airport, a taxi is often the only way patients can get to and from both airports, and yet it is not sustainable for the department to reimburse Mildura residents for a flight to access vital specialist medical treatment. How can that be? That is what patients are being told at the moment: it is not sustainable for the department to reimburse Mildura residents to access specialist health care. How can patients be expected to foot the bill without any reimbursement and without any assistance from the public sector when those services have been taken away from the Mildura Base Public Hospital?

Footscray community services

Katie HALL (Footscray) (17:12): (632) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to attend a traders meeting with me in Footscray to discuss support services that are available for people experiencing homelessness, mental health issues and issues with alcohol or other drugs in Footscray CBD. Footscray has always been a place where people can access the services they need. I have spoken many times in this place regarding the services that support people in our community, from McAuley social services to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Cohealth or Reaching out in the Inner West.

It is important to me, to traders and to the broader community that people receive the outreach services they need personally and that Footscray's mall is an active, clean and safe place to shop or dine out. I have met with local council, the City of Maribyrnong, and their mayor and CEO to raise these issues and discuss better enforcement of local laws through regular attendance of compliance officers and the possibilities for urban design improvements through greater activation, which is engagement I will continue with. I have also met with local police and a seniors community outreach representative to discuss ideas that might assist traders. I look forward to having the minister visit Footscray to discuss the state government funded services that are available.

Budget 2024–25

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (17:13): (633) My adjournment tonight is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the necessary funding to be allocated in next week's budget for health, education and infrastructure projects on the southern Mornington Peninsula. Just like I did last year, I stand here ahead of the budget really urging this government to fund the necessary health measures needed on the Mornington Peninsula, and specifically at Rosebud Hospital. Yes, there is a fantastic development going on at Frankston, and that is fantastic for those people that live further north, but we certainly need the upgrade of Rosebud Hospital to be funded asap. We cannot have people travelling 45 minutes to get the health care they need, especially in metropolitan Melbourne.

The vital piece of infrastructure that I want to see funded is the overpass at Jetty Road. We know that there was \$70 million of federal funding sitting there for a number of years, and that was recently withdrawn by the Albanese federal Labor government because this government here in Victoria refused to allocate that funding to the necessary projects. I am still calling for that project to be funded.

In the education space we have a number of schools that are needing funding out of this budget. Eastbourne Primary School had planning funding last year. They need to see the \$9.5 million they were promised before the 2022 election to upgrade that school, and I am hoping that is going to come in next week's budget. Rye Primary School have got an external staircase to get to their second-floor classrooms that has no roof and needs an upgrade to the safety measures. They have got toilets that are more than 20 years old that also need refurbishing, and they have also got some roofing and drainage issues that need to be looked at. Tootgarook Primary School remains the only school in my electorate without an undercover play or basketball area, and they have been crying out for that for a number of years. As the only school without one of those, I urge that to be funded.

St Joseph's Primary School down in Sorrento are looking, and I have written to the Minister for Education on this, for an expansion of the school bus program. It is currently not allocated to schools that are not government schools unless they are in regional Victoria, and of course St Joseph's in Sorrento has been stuck in that metro-regional debate. That is currently costing the school upwards of \$65,000. Finally, Red Hill Consolidated School are in desperate need of an upgrade to their prep classrooms. They were built in the 1950s. I was out there just last week with the principal. Those classrooms are old, they are tired, they are small, and they are full of mosquitoes because the windows do not close properly. For a government that wants to spruik energy efficiency, classrooms that old – 1950s – are expensive to cool in summer and are expensive to heat in winter, so I urge this government to look at those classrooms out at Red Hill Consolidated School. They also recently applied for a grant to get their toilets upgraded. As I said, I hope the Treasurer puts the funding for that in next week's budget, and I will wait with bated breath.

The SPEAKER: Can I remind the Leader of the Nationals to acknowledge the Chair when he crosses in front of the mace, please.

Bentleigh Secondary College

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (17:16): (634) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Premier, and the action that I seek from the Premier is that she visits Bentleigh Secondary College to officially open the brand new performing arts centre later this year.

I actually went on a tour of the construction site recently with seven superstars – they were Aiden Atlas, Thomas McGill, Klaudia Nantz, Chloe Holt, Oscar Green, Tiana Bray and Ella Slattery – and I can tell you it is looking absolutely amazing. It has absolutely everything. It has got a theatre of around 500 seats. It has got a dance studio. It has got instrumental music rooms. It has got classrooms. It has got a new canteen. It has everything that this outstanding school needs for their amazing performing arts program. As you can see, I am very enthusiastic about it, because I have spent the last 10 years as a local member attending many, many amazing musical productions at the old performing arts centre at Bentleigh, which was not fit for purpose. I am really looking forward to the amazing things that Bentleigh Secondary College can do in their performing arts program with this fit-for-purpose building, and I would ask that the Premier herself visits Bentleigh Secondary College to officially open it when the time comes.

Warrandyte Mechanics Institute and Arts Association

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:18): (635) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action that I seek is for the minister to fund urgent repairs and save Warrandyte community pottery. The pottery studio was once a fire station, built in the early 1900s to protect the community, and it was later converted into a pottery studio. Warrandyte community pottery holds a cherished place in the hearts of many as a hub of creativity, connection and community spirit. Its inclusive ethos welcomes all, fostering social wellbeing and providing a vital space for artistic expression. The pottery studio has over the years produced many projects, from a range of letterboxes for victims of the Kinglake bushfires and, more recently, a birdbath for a garden at a palliative care facility. Warrandyte community pottery provides significant benefits to our community. To quote one testimonial:

... my wife Corinne ... suffered a severe hit to her head resulting in an Acquired Brain Injury ... our neighbour ... reached out and suggested that Corinne come along to the Warrandyte pottery group for some social interaction and art therapy ...

This group offered a friendly, encouraging and welcoming place for Corinne to participate. It helped her enormously in her rehabilitation back to reconnecting with society ... As Corinne was unable to drive at the time, this became her main group to feel a connection with, which certainly helped her to keep her spirits up during some hard times. Unfortunately, a few years ago Corinne was diagnosed with breast cancer. This group kept her included in what was happening and in on-line group chats ... It was so important to her mental health and emotional well-being.

However, this is all under threat. In 2022 serious termite damage was detected, and in a subsequent survey the damage was found to be extensive and involves some safety-critical elements of the building. I am with this group tomorrow night, and this group, the Warrandyte Mechanics Institute and Arts Association, has put together a detailed plan to save the pottery studio. I hope the minister listens to their concerns and saves this critical space in our community.

Springvale Park Special Developmental School

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (17:20): (636) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that he joins me at Springvale Park Special Developmental School to meet with the wonderful staff and students and tour the school, with a focus on the site of a new classroom. In 2020 the state government invested \$66,000 from the Minor Capital Works Fund to upgrade the school's bike shed. In the 2022–23 budget the state government invested over \$8 million for new classrooms to replace portables, and in the 2023–24 budget the government provided money from the \$25 million Hydrotherapy Pools at Specialist Schools Fund to build a new hydrotherapy pool. My electorate includes two developmental schools, and I am proud to be part of a government that understands that 'no student being left behind' includes special developmental schools and treats their advocacy just as seriously as other public schools. I thank the minister for his advocacy on these issues and look forward to him joining me soon at the Springvale Park Special Developmental School.

Short-stay accommodation

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (17:21): (637) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that I seek is for the government to free up 13,000 existing homes for renters and first home buyers to live in by properly regulating Airbnb. There are 48,000 homes, entire homes, on Airbnb in Victoria – property investors hoarding homes to use as quasi-hotels. How have we ended up with a housing system where some people can own 37 properties and others have absolutely nowhere to live? Airbnb drives up house prices, it locks out first home buyers and it takes away homes from renters.

The Greens' plan to cap the number of days that a property can be on a platform like Airbnb would force 35 per cent of these property investors – those who have bought up these homes just to make exorbitant profits on Airbnb – to reconsider their choices. Maybe it would be better to rent out this home long term or to sell it to someone who would actually live in it. We have an opportunity in the coming state budget to make 13,000 of those homes currently on Airbnb available right now for people to live in. By contrast, Labor's holiday levy would at best build 100 apartments a year – just a bandaid on a bullet wound. Regulating Airbnb in this way is not radical. It is actually a very reasonable and normal thing to do. Most major cities around the world have already put in limits on Airbnb. Some have even banned the platform altogether.

Labor is going to need our vote to pass this levy, but the Greens have made it very clear we will not support anything that will see the housing crisis get worse. We are asking Labor: come to the table; work with the Greens on policies that will actually make homes available for people to live in.

Christies Road, Ravenhall

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (17:23): (638) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to investigate options to address the increasing traffic build-up on Christies Road in Ravenhall. Currently Christies Road, which is located south of Ballarat Road, takes on the weight of close to 22,300 vehicles daily, a number that is predicted to skyrocket to over 29,000 vehicles in seven years. Such projections paint a stark picture of the imminent challenges which we face in managing the flow of traffic through this area.

As the primary conduit connecting essential destinations such as the Western Highway, Caroline Springs station and local industries, the significance of Christies Road cannot be overstated. Thanks to the Victorian government, Caroline Springs station has had massive upgrades of its car park and platforms to allow for an increase in public transport commuters. Additionally, the Western Freeway

over the years has also greatly benefited from upgrades by the Victorian government to allow for the faster and smoother flow of traffic on the freeway. However, the access point between these facilities and residents is limited due to Christies Road. Caroline Springs Boulevard is duplicated – a four-lane road north of Ballarat Road; however, Christies Road south of Ballarat Road is a single carriageway and acts as a major bottleneck for commuters accessing the Western Highway, Caroline Springs station and, as I said, local industries. I would be very interested to hear about any options which would improve safety at this location. I thank the minister for her constant work to improve road safety here in Victoria.

Swan Hill Community Issues Group

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (17:25): (639) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Skills and TAFE in the other place, and the action that I seek from the minister is to meet with representatives from the Swan Hill Rural City Council and the Swan Hill Community Issues Group with the aim to find a way to have the Swan Hill region declared as a standalone Adult Multicultural Education Services region, or AMES. AMES is a Victorian public entity that is accountable to the Minister for Skills and TAFE and the Minister for Regional Development under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, and the minister has both those portfolios. On the AMES website it lists Mallee Family Care as the provider of services to refugees in Swan Hill, but that is not a service that Mallee Family Care is delivering in Swan Hill. The very limited support that the Swan Hill Community Issues Group gets comes from Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, or SMECC, from Mildura, but SMECC is finding their resources are limited and they are withdrawing support for the Swan Hill group there when it comes to delivering refugee services.

At the moment the Swan Hill issues group works out of a hall at the back of the Uniting Church. They are all volunteers that work with the refugees in Swan Hill, helping them with their employment and settlement issues, with asylum seeker programs and particularly with visas for family members to get them to come to Australia once they have the ability to do that. This group has worked tirelessly now for a decade helping refugees in Swan Hill as volunteers, and I would like the minister to meet with them and representatives from the Swan Hill Rural City Council to work through how we can actually have Swan Hill declared as its own region and get some resources to support these very worthwhile refugees in our community and take some pressure off the volunteers, who are finding the work very, very hard to continue all the time without some paid staff to support them.

Family violence

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (17:27): (640) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. The action I seek is for the minister to convene an urgent roundtable meeting in Ballarat with community leaders and the family violence sector to discuss what more we can do to address the family violence epidemic in our region. As many in this place know, our region has been crippled with deep sadness in recent months with the tragic deaths of Rebecca Young, Samantha Murphy and Hannah McGuire. All three women were allegedly victims of violence at the hands of men. In Clunes the community lost an angel with a heart of gold in 23-year-old Hannah McGuire last month. I send my deepest condolences to Glenn, Deb, Fletcher, Jude and her entire family at this devastating time, and I stand with the Clunes community and broader region in saying enough is enough. We are sick of losing our local women, and we are sick of feeling unsafe.

On 12 April I joined over 1000 people who came together to march in the streets of Ballarat and call out men's violence against women. It was a bittersweet event, with rage, raw emotion and determination to end violence once and for all. As a state we have come a long, long way, with almost \$4 billion spent to end violence against women in the last 10 years, but we know that there is so much more to do, and we want to get on with it. Local leaders and family violence workers are eager to meet and discuss what more can be done next, and I know that all Labor MPs in and around Ballarat are too. I welcome the chance for the minister to convene this urgent meeting at a time when our community is desperate for more action.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:29): The member for Mildura asked me a question in relation to funding for the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme. This is a really important scheme for people in rural and regional Victoria. It provides a subsidy to people that have to travel to access the healthcare services that they need. It is for eligible patients who live in a designated rural area and who need to travel either 100 kilometres one way or 500 kilometres per week to see a medical specialist. I am very happy to note the request from the member for Mildura and also to point to the great work that our government has done to ensure that the people of Mildura are better able to access the health care that they need. Of course it was our government that brought the Mildura hospital back into public hands after it had been privatised by a previous Liberal–National government. It was also a great pleasure to not that long ago visit Mildura hospital, which was one of the first sites to be a hub partner with the Royal Women’s Hospital to deliver public IVF services to the people of Mildura. When we are talking about the tyranny of distance, ensuring that women and couples can access public IVF services in a place like Mildura is fantastic.

The member for Footscray raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Mental Health requesting that the minister visit her electorate and meet with traders at the Footscray mall. I am very happy to speak directly with the minister. I am sure she would look forward to doing that and meeting with your traders, and I am sure she appreciates the request you have made for her, member for Footscray. The member for Nepean, who I note is no longer in the chamber, requested that the Treasurer fund various projects in his electorate. The member for Bentleigh, who is in the chamber, requested that the Premier join with him in opening the performing arts centre at Bentleigh Secondary College. Having been in this place as long as the member for Bentleigh, I know on so many occasions the member for Bentleigh has celebrated the wonderful performances that he has seen given by students in their musicals. I know that this will have been a real passion project of his. I am sure that the Premier would look forward to joining you, member for Bentleigh. The member for Warrandyte, who is no longer in the chamber, had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Creative Industries, and she requested funding for a pottery studio in her electorate.

The member for Mulgrave had a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and she is requesting that the Minister for Education join her at Springvale Park Specialist Developmental School to look at the outcomes of increased investment in that school. The member for Mulgrave, being relatively new to the chamber, may or may not know that it is our government, in the 10 years that we have been in, that has invested in every specialist developmental school in the state. That was a project that education ministers have taken very, very seriously. While I am on my feet, can I encourage everyone to look on iView for a doco on the Sunbury and Macedon Ranges Specialist School, which is about their journey to perform their school production, and it is absolutely winning hearts and minds everywhere. It is called *This Is Going To Be Big*.

The member for Richmond, who is no longer in the chamber, raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs requesting that she regulate Airbnb. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that the member for Kororoit has requested is that the minister join her in her electorate to consider options to meet the increased traffic demand on Christies Road in Ravenhall and that she consider ways in which that road could be upgraded in order to meet that increased demand.

The member for Murray Plains, who is in the chamber, raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and the matter that he has requested is that the minister meet with the Swan Hill council and the Swan Hill issues group to hear their concerns and consider their proposition that Swan Hill be considered a standalone Australian Multicultural Education Services service region and that AMES be established in Swan Hill in order to better serve the multicultural and refugee communities within his electorate. The member for Ripon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work that the member

ADJOURNMENT

1510

Legislative Assembly

Thursday 2 May 2024

for Ripon has done in supporting her community through some very, very challenging times. The member has requested that the minister join her and convene an urgent round table to discuss what more can be done to stop men's violence against women and children.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Thank you to the staff. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:35 pm.