

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION**

Wednesday, 24 May 2017

(Extract from book 6)

Internet: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/downloadhansard

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

The ministry

(from 10 November 2016)

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| Premier | The Hon. D. M. Andrews, MP |
| Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Emergency Services | The Hon. J. A. Merlino, MP |
| Treasurer | The Hon. T. H. Pallas, MP |
| Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Major Projects | The Hon. J. Allan, MP |
| Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade | The Hon. P. Dalidakis, MLC |
| Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and Minister for Suburban Development | The Hon. L. D'Ambrosio, MP |
| Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and Minister for Ports | The Hon. L. A. Donnellan, MP |
| Minister for Tourism and Major Events, Minister for Sport and Minister for Veterans | The Hon. J. H. Eren, MP |
| Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality and Minister for Creative Industries | The Hon. M. P. Foley, MP |
| Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services | The Hon. J. Hennessy, MP |
| Minister for Local Government, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Industrial Relations | The Hon. N. M. Hutchins, MP |
| Special Minister of State | The Hon. G. Jennings, MLC |
| Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation | The Hon. M. Kairouz, MP |
| Minister for Families and Children, and Minister for Youth Affairs | The Hon. J. Mikakos, MLC |
| Minister for Police and Minister for Water | The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP |
| Minister for Industry and Employment, and Minister for Resources | The Hon. W. M. Noonan, MP |
| Attorney-General and Minister for Racing | The Hon. M. P. Pakula, MP |
| Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development | The Hon. J. L. Pulford, MLC |
| Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence | The Hon. F. Richardson, MP |
| Minister for Finance and Minister for Multicultural Affairs | The Hon. R. D. Scott, MP |
| Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Corrections | The Hon. G. A. Tierney, MLC |
| Minister for Planning | The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP |
| Cabinet Secretary | Ms M. Thomas, MP |

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

Speaker

The Hon. C. W. BROOKS (from 7 March 2017)

The Hon. TELMO LANGUILLER (to 25 February 2017)

Deputy Speaker

Ms J. MAREE EDWARDS (from 7 March 2017)

Mr D. A. NARDELLA (to 27 February 2017)

Acting Speakers

Ms Blandthorn, Mr Carbines, Ms Couzens, Mr Dimopoulos, Ms Graley,
Ms Kilkenny, Ms Knight, Mr McGuire, Mr Pearson, Ms Spence, Ms Thomson and Ms Ward.

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

The Hon. D. M. ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

The Hon. J. A. MERLINO

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. M. J. GUY

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

The Hon. D. J. HODGETT

Leader of The Nationals

The Hon. P. L. WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals

Ms S. RYAN

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey

Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A. Young

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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

| Member | District | Party | Member | District | Party |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|--|------------------|--------------|
| Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie | Bendigo East | ALP | McLeish, Ms Lucinda Gaye | Eildon | LP |
| Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael | Mulgrave | ALP | Merlino, Mr James Anthony | Monbulk | ALP |
| Angus, Mr Neil Andrew Warwick | Forest Hill | LP | Morris, Mr David Charles | Mornington | LP |
| Asher, Ms Louise | Brighton | LP | Mulder, Mr Terence Wynn ² | Polwarth | LP |
| Battin, Mr Bradley William | Gembrook | LP | Naphthine, Dr Denis Vincent ³ | South-West Coast | LP |
| Blackwood, Mr Gary John | Narracan | LP | Nardella, Mr Donato Antonio ⁴ | Melton | Ind |
| Blandthorn, Ms Elizabeth Anne | Pascoe Vale | ALP | Neville, Ms Lisa Mary | Bellarine | ALP |
| Britnell, Ms Roma ¹ | South-West Coast | LP | Noonan, Mr Wade Matthew | Williamstown | ALP |
| Brooks, Mr Colin William | Bundoora | ALP | Northe, Mr Russell John | Morwell | Nats |
| Bull, Mr Joshua Michael | Sunbury | ALP | O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ⁵ | Gippsland South | Nats |
| Bull, Mr Timothy Owen | Gippsland East | Nats | O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony | Malvern | LP |
| Burgess, Mr Neale Ronald | Hastings | LP | Pakula, Mr Martin Philip | Keysborough | ALP |
| Carbines, Mr Anthony Richard | Ivanhoe | ALP | Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh | Werribee | ALP |
| Carroll, Mr Benjamin Alan | Niddrie | ALP | Paynter, Mr Brian Francis | Bass | LP |
| Clark, Mr Robert William | Box Hill | LP | Pearson, Mr Daniel James | Essendon | ALP |
| Couzens, Ms Christine Anne | Geelong | ALP | Perera, Mr Jude | Cranbourne | ALP |
| Crisp, Mr Peter Laurence | Mildura | Nats | Pesutto, Mr John | Hawthorn | LP |
| D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana | Mill Park | ALP | Richardson, Mr Timothy Noel | Mordialloc | ALP |
| Dimopoulos, Mr Stephen | Oakleigh | ALP | Richardson, Ms Fiona Catherine Alison | Northcote | ALP |
| Dixon, Mr Martin Francis | Nepean | LP | Riordan, Mr Richard ⁶ | Polwarth | LP |
| Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony | Narre Warren North | ALP | Ryall, Ms Deanne Sharon | Ringwood | LP |
| Edbrooke, Mr Paul Andrew | Frankston | ALP | Ryan, Mr Peter Julian ⁷ | Gippsland South | Nats |
| Edwards, Ms Janice Maree | Bendigo West | ALP | Ryan, Ms Stephanie Maureen | Euroa | Nats |
| Eren, Mr John Hamdi | Lara | ALP | Sandell, Ms Ellen | Melbourne | Greens |
| Foley, Mr Martin Peter | Albert Park | ALP | Scott, Mr Robin David | Preston | ALP |
| Fyffe, Mrs Christine Anne | Evelyn | LP | Sheed, Ms Suzanna | Shepparton | Ind |
| Garrett, Ms Jane Furneaux | Brunswick | ALP | Smith, Mr Ryan | Warrandyte | LP |
| Gidley, Mr Michael Xavier Charles | Mount Waverley | LP | Smith, Mr Timothy Colin | Kew | LP |
| Graley, Ms Judith Ann | Narre Warren South | ALP | Southwick, Mr David James | Caulfield | LP |
| Green, Ms Danielle Louise | Yan Yean | ALP | Spence, Ms Rosalind Louise | Yuroke | ALP |
| Guy, Mr Matthew Jason | Bulleen | LP | Staikos, Mr Nicholas | Bentleigh | ALP |
| Halfpenny, Ms Bronwyn | Thomastown | ALP | Staley, Ms Louise Eileen | Ripon | LP |
| Hennessy, Ms Jill | Altona | ALP | Suleyman, Ms Natalie | St Albans | ALP |
| Hibbins, Mr Samuel Peter | Prahran | Greens | Thomas, Ms Mary-Anne | Macedon | ALP |
| Hodgett, Mr David John | Croydon | LP | Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton Ross | Sandringham | LP |
| Howard, Mr Geoffrey Kemp | Buninyong | ALP | Thomson, Ms Marsha Rose | Footscray | ALP |
| Hutchins, Ms Natalie Maree Sykes | Sydenham | ALP | Tilley, Mr William John | Benambra | LP |
| Kairouz, Ms Marlene | Kororoit | ALP | Victoria, Ms Heidi | Bayswater | LP |
| Katos, Mr Andrew | South Barwon | LP | Wakeling, Mr Nicholas | Ferntree Gully | LP |
| Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne | Lowan | Nats | Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay | Murray Plains | Nats |
| Kilkenny, Ms Sonya | Carrum | ALP | Ward, Ms Vicki | Eltham | ALP |
| Knight, Ms Sharon Patricia | Wendouree | ALP | Watt, Mr Graham Travis | Burwood | LP |
| Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon | Tarneit | ALP | Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur | Rowville | LP |
| Lim, Mr Muy Hong | Clarinda | ALP | Williams, Ms Gabrielle | Dandenong | ALP |
| McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan | Ovens Valley | Nats | Wynne, Mr Richard William | Richmond | ALP |
| McGuire, Mr Frank | Broadmeadows | ALP | | | |

¹ Elected 31 October 2015

² Resigned 3 September 2015

³ Resigned 3 September 2015

⁴ ALP until 7 March 2017

⁵ Elected 14 March 2015

⁶ Elected 31 October 2015

⁷ Resigned 2 February 2015

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

Legislative Assembly committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Allan, Mr Clark, Ms D’Ambrosio, Mr Morris, Ms Neville, Ms Ryan, Ms Sandell, Mr Scott and Mr Wells.

Standing Orders Committee — The Speaker, Ms Allan, Ms Asher, Mr Carroll, Mr Clark, Ms Edwards, Mr Hibbins, Mr Hodgett, Ms Kairouz, Ms Ryan and Ms Sheed.

Legislative Assembly select committees

Penalty Rates and Fair Pay Select Committee — Ms Blandthorn, Mr J. Bull, Mr Clark, Mr Hibbins, Ms Ryall, Ms Suleyman and Ms Williams.

Joint committees

Accountability and Oversight Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Angus, Mr Gidley, Mr Staikos and Ms Thomson. (*Council*): Mr O’Sullivan, Mr Purcell and Ms Symes.

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Allan, Mr Clark, Mr Merlino, Mr M. O’Brien, Mr Pakula, Ms Richardson and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Dalidakis, Ms Dunn, Mr Jennings and Ms Wooldridge.

Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Garrett and Ms Ryall. (*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Elasmarr and Mr Melhem.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Asher, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Dixon, Mr Northe and Ms Spence. (*Council*): Ms Patten, Mr Somyurek.

Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr J. Bull, Ms Halfpenny, Mr Richardson and Mr Riordan. (*Council*): Mr O’Sullivan, Mr Ramsay and Mr Young.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Britnell, Ms Couzens, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Edwards and Ms McLeish. (*Council*): Mr Finn.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr J. Bull, Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Staikos, Ms Suleyman and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Eideh, Ms Hartland, Ms Lovell, Mr Mulino and Mr Young.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Hibbins, Mr D. O’Brien, Mr Richardson, Ms Thomson and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Ms Symes.

Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Mr Howard, Ms Suleyman, Mr Thompson and Mr Tilley. (*Council*): Mr Eideh and Ms Patten.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Morris, Mr Pearson, Mr T. Smith, Ms Staley and Ms Ward. (*Council*): Ms Patten, Ms Pennicuik and Ms Shing.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Blandthorn, Mr J. Bull, Mr Dimopoulos, Ms Kilkenny and Mr Pesutto. (*Council*): Ms Bath and Mr Dalla-Riva.

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 24 MAY 2017

| | | | |
|---|------|---|------------------------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY | 1341 | <i>Latrobe Valley economy</i> | 1354 |
| CONDOLENCES | | <i>Fire services</i> | 1354 |
| <i>William Thomas Ebery</i> | 1341 | <i>Country Fire Authority Kangaroo Flat brigade</i> | 1355 |
| MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES | 1341 | <i>Land tax</i> | 1355 |
| JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PROTECTIVE SERVICES OFFICERS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2017 | | <i>Beach Road cyclists</i> | 1355 |
| <i>Introduction and first reading</i> | 1342 | <i>Minister for Education</i> | 1356 |
| JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (COURT SECURITY, JURIES AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2017 | | <i>Great South West Dairy Awards</i> | 1357 |
| <i>Introduction and first reading</i> | 1343 | STATEMENTS ON REPORTS | |
| BAIL AMENDMENT (STAGE ONE) BILL 2017 | | <i>Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:</i> | |
| <i>Introduction and first reading</i> | 1343 | <i>budget estimates 2016–17</i> | 1357, 1369 |
| CHILDREN AND JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM) BILL 2017 | | <i>Electoral Matters Committee: electronic voting</i> | 1370, 1373 |
| <i>Introduction and first reading</i> | 1343 | <i>Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee: Country Fire Authority Fiskville training college</i> | 1371 |
| SENTENCING AMENDMENT (SENTENCING STANDARDS) BILL 2017 | | <i>Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:</i> | |
| <i>Introduction and first reading</i> | 1343 | <i>financial and performance outcomes 2015–16</i> | 1371, 1372 |
| DISABILITY AMENDMENT BILL 2017 | | MANCHESTER TERRORIST ATTACK | 1358 |
| <i>Introduction and first reading</i> | 1344 | QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS | |
| FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2017 | | <i>Victims of crime support</i> | 1359, 1360 |
| <i>Introduction and first reading</i> | 1344 | <i>Ministers statements: firefighters presumptive rights legislation</i> | 1360, 1364 |
| RETIREMENT OF CLERK | 1344 | <i>Fire services</i> | 1360, 1361, 1362, 1363, 1364 |
| PETITIONS | | <i>Ministers statements: fire services</i> | 1362 |
| <i>Croydon railway station car parking</i> | 1344 | <i>Ministers statements: forest firefighters</i> | 1363 |
| PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE | | <i>Member for Melton</i> | 1365 |
| <i>Financial and performance outcomes 2015–16</i> | 1345 | <i>Ministers statements: Country Fire Authority funding</i> | 1366 |
| <i>Membership</i> | 1346 | SUSPENSION OF MEMBER | |
| SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE | | <i>Member for Ripon</i> | 1362 |
| <i>Alert Digest No. 7</i> | 1345 | CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS | |
| DOCUMENTS | 1345 | <i>Rowville electorate</i> | 1367 |
| ROYAL ASSENT | 1345 | <i>Pascoe Vale electorate</i> | 1367 |
| APPROPRIATION MESSAGES | 1346 | <i>Euroa electorate</i> | 1367 |
| RULINGS BY THE CHAIR | | <i>Broadmeadows electorate</i> | 1368 |
| <i>Questions without notice</i> | 1346 | <i>Evelyn electorate</i> | 1368 |
| MEMBER FOR GEMBROOK | 1346 | <i>Narre Warren South electorate</i> | 1368 |
| BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE | | <i>Bass electorate</i> | 1368 |
| <i>Program</i> | 1346 | <i>Yuroke electorate</i> | 1369 |
| MEMBERS STATEMENTS | | <i>Polwarth electorate</i> | 1369 |
| <i>Member for Gembrook</i> 1349, 1350, 1351, 1352, 1354, 1355, 1356 | | <i>Sunbury electorate</i> | 1369 |
| <i>Income tax</i> | 1349 | STATE TAXATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL 2017 | |
| <i>Country Fire Authority volunteers</i> | 1350 | <i>Second reading</i> | 1374, 1400 |
| <i>Victims of crime support service</i> | 1352 | MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE | |
| <i>Firefighters</i> | 1352 | <i>Firefighters</i> | 1380 |
| <i>Benambra electorate roads</i> | 1352 | CITY OF GREATER GEELONG AMENDMENT BILL 2017 | |
| <i>Shepparton street art mural</i> | 1353 | <i>Second reading</i> | 1413 |
| <i>Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre</i> | 1353 | CORRECTIONS LEGISLATION MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENT BILL 2017 | |
| | | <i>Second reading</i> | 1426 |
| | | ADJOURNMENT | |
| | | <i>Malka Leifer</i> | 1427 |
| | | <i>Craigieburn ambulance station</i> | 1428 |
| | | <i>Drouin ambulance station</i> | 1428 |
| | | <i>Sunbury police numbers</i> | 1428 |

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| <i>Downey and Grant streets, Alexandra</i> | 1429 |
| <i>Macedon electorate rail services</i> | 1429 |
| <i>Route 58 tram stop</i> | 1429 |
| <i>Victorian Jobs Partnership</i> | 1430 |
| <i>Warrnambool Special Development School</i> | 1430 |
| <i>Sandringham Hospital</i> | 1431 |
| <i>Responses</i> | 1431 |

Wednesday, 24 May 2017

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER — Order! We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

CONDOLENCES

William Thomas Ebery

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house of the death of William Thomas Ebery, member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Midlands from 1973 to 1985. I ask members to rise in their places as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased.

Honourable members stood in their places.

The SPEAKER — Order! Thank you, members. I shall convey a message of sympathy from the house to the relatives of the late member.

Mr Merlino — On a point of order, Speaker, on Wednesday, 10 May, in this place the member for Gembrook said:

When we go back — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Deputy Premier, on a point of order.

Mr Merlino — The member for Gembrook said:

When we go back to February 2009 — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Members on my left, I need to be able to hear the point of order being raised.

Mr Merlino — The member for Gembrook said:

When we go back to February 2009, the minister should be able to tell us how many career firefighters —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Hawthorn is warned.

Mr Merlino —

were on the firefighting ground on 7 February for the first 5½ hours on Black Saturday. I can tell the house that it was zero.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I call the Deputy Premier.

Mr Merlino — The member for Gembrook said:

When we go back to February 2009, the minister should be able to tell us how many career firefighters were on the firefighting ground on 7 February for the first 5½ hours on Black Saturday. I can tell the house that it was zero.

The SPEAKER — Order! It is very difficult to rule on a point of order when I cannot hear what is being said.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte can raise a point of order if he wishes to raise a point of order. I call the Deputy Premier to make a point of order.

Mr Merlino — Thank you, Speaker. Clearly the member's comments are not only offensive and hurtful but also grossly misleading, and I ask the member to make a personal explanation in this place.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am prepared to rule on the point of order. There is no — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Government members will come to order. There is no point of order. It is not for other members of the house to seek a personal explanation from other members.

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, I seek you to direct the Deputy Premier to make a personal explanation for calling protective services officers (PSOs) 'plastic police'. He should apologise.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Further on the point of order.

MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr Guy — I desire to move, by leave:

That this house condemn the Deputy Premier for calling PSOs 'plastic police'.

They deserve more respect from you.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! It is very early in the sitting day, and there is a lot of energy in the chamber. It is too early in the day for me to be removing members from the chamber, but I will do that if the level of shouting that has already occurred today persists.

Before the Leader of the Opposition is able to seek leave to move a motion, I need to rule on his point of order. My ruling is, similar to the previous point of order that was raised by the member for Monbulk, the Deputy Premier, that it is not within the right of any member of this place to seek a personal explanation from another member.

Mr Guy — Thank you, Speaker. Given leave has not been denied, I now wish to make my contribution on the Deputy Premier apologising for calling our proud PSOs ‘plastic police’. Our proud PSOs deserve more than to be treated — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have not asked if leave is granted for the Leader of the Opposition’s motion. Is leave granted?

Leave refused.

The SPEAKER — Order! We are going to move on to introduction of bills.

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, I had begun my contribution. Leave had not been denied. I have the right to make a contribution on the urgency motion I moved about making this man apologise to protective services officers for the disgraceful comments that he made to denigrate our PSOs and the proud work they do to protect us all on railway stations. For this man, the Deputy Premier, who lied to Country Fire Authority volunteers, who treats our PSOs with disrespect, to get up — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Firstly, I warn the member for Warrandyte. I do not need his assistance through constant shouting. Secondly, a point of order is not an opportunity to make a speech. Leave had not been granted for the Leader of the Opposition to continue.

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PROTECTIVE SERVICES OFFICERS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2017

Introduction and first reading

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Police) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend various acts in relation to powers of protective services officers — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms NEVILLE — It is an act that is about recognising and acknowledging the role of our protective services officers (PSOs). I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend various acts in relation to powers of protective services officers on duty at designated places, to provide for psychological fitness for duty assessments for police officers and protective services officers, to facilitate attendance of children held in police custody to and from courts and youth justice facilities, to amend the Second-Hand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act 1989 to regulate payments for scrap metal and to provide for enforcement, to amend the Corrections Act 1986 to extend to police custody officer supervisors the powers under part 9A of that act, to amend the Victoria Police Act 2013 to establish the role of police custody officer supervisors in police gaols, to make consequential and other technical amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation of the bill and whether it includes an apology from the Deputy Premier for referring to PSOs as ‘plastic police’.

The SPEAKER — Order! I expected better from the manager of opposition business.

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Police) — Let us be very clear: this bill is all about enhancing the role of our PSOs — something that those opposite did not do — making sure we have got PSOs able to act in broader designated areas, providing more powers to our PSOs and really acknowledging the work that they do. We are the ones who have got on and backed our PSOs, and this bill does that.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Box Hill asked the minister whether the bill would include an apology from the Deputy Premier regarding his comments calling PSOs ‘plastic police’, and the minister failed to respond to that question from the member for Box Hill. I ask you to have her rise and let the chamber know whether that apology is forthcoming.

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

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(COURT SECURITY, JURIES AND OTHER
MATTERS) BILL 2017**

Introduction and first reading

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Appeal Costs Act 1998, the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Confiscation Act 1997, the County Court Act 1958, the Court Security Act 1980, the Court Services Victoria Act 2014, the Courts (Case Transfer) Act 1991, the Judicial College of Victoria Act 2001, the Judicial Entitlements Act 2015, the Juries Act 2000, the Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986, the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014, the Magistrates' Court Act 1989 and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998, to make miscellaneous minor amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Read first time.

**BAIL AMENDMENT (STAGE ONE)
BILL 2017**

Introduction and first reading

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Bail Act 1977 to make fresh provision about the circumstances in which bail may be granted or refused and who may grant bail, to amend the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Mr PESUTTO (Hawthorn) — I seek an explanation of the bill and why it has taken so long to reach this house.

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — The bill implements the first stage of reforms consequent on the recommendations of the Coghlan review, including the addition of offences to the exceptional circumstances category, the addition of a range of offences to the reverse onus categories and other changes.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**CHILDREN AND JUSTICE LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (YOUTH JUSTICE
REFORM) BILL 2017**

Introduction and first reading

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Crimes Act 1958 in relation to recruiting children to engage in criminal activity, to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 in relation to the hearing of proceedings, sentencing, the removal to and from, and detention of, persons at remand centres, youth residential centres and youth justice centres, and to deal with offences committed at those centres, to further provide for management of detainees and youth offenders, to provide for the increase of penalties for certain offences, to make provision in relation to information sharing, to amend the Sentencing Act 1991 and other acts in relation to serious youth offences, to amend the Corrections Act 1986 and other acts in relation to remand, and for other purposes.

Mr PESUTTO (Hawthorn) — I seek an explanation of the bill.

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — The legislation brings in many of the changes that the government outlined when we released the community safety statement last year, including the introduction of youth control orders, including the introduction of a new offence of recruiting young people to engage in criminal activity, including additional penalties for those who commit offences in youth detention facilities, including the presumption of uplift to the higher courts and other matters.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**SENTENCING AMENDMENT
(SENTENCING STANDARDS) BILL 2017**

Introduction and first reading

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Sentencing Act 1991 to repeal the baseline sentencing scheme, provide for standard sentences for indictable offences and enhance the scheme in that act for the giving of guideline judgements, to amend the Crimes Act 1958 and the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to remove references to the baseline sentencing scheme and fix a standard sentence for certain offences against those acts and for other purposes.

Read first time.

DISABILITY AMENDMENT BILL 2017*Introduction and first reading*

Mr FOLEY (Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Disability Act 2006 and for other purposes.

Mr T. BULL (Gippsland East) — I seek a brief explanation of the bill beyond the title.

Mr FOLEY (Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing) — For the information of the honourable member and the house, this is a bill that implements the recommendations from the 2016 parliamentary inquiry into abuse in disability services and also seeks to put procedures in place for the transition to the national disability insurance scheme.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS
COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM)
BILL 2017**

Introduction and first reading

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to provide a rebuttable presumption for career firefighters and volunteer firefighters suffering from specified forms of cancer for the purposes of claiming compensation under the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013, to amend the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958, the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 and certain other acts to reform fire services and for other purposes.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) — I request a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — I am proud to provide an explanation of this bill and note that the member does not want to deliver a personal explanation to the house.

First of all, this bill delivers presumptive rights to cancer compensation for career and volunteer firefighters, a presumption denied by the Liberal Party and the National Party — a presumption denied.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is misleading the house. I ask leave to table a press release dated 6 November where the coalition

was completely supportive of this policy. I ask leave to table this.

Leave refused.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. I remind honourable members that the provision allowing for a brief explanation of a bill being introduced is to allow for just that; it is not an opportunity for debate across the chamber.

Mr MERLINO — We will deliver equality for our career and volunteer firefighters. There are certain cancers that are clearly linked to firefighting duties. We will provide that presumption on an equal basis based on the Queensland model. The bill will also deliver recommendation 63 of the bushfires royal commission. Previous governments failed to deliver recommendation 63; we will deliver that as part of this bill. We will also deliver structural reform — a single career firefighting force in Fire Rescue Victoria and enshrining the volunteer nature of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in legislation — clarifying the powers of the chief officer of the CFA and establishing Fire Rescue Victoria, with the management and governance of Fire Rescue Victoria based on the management and governance model of Victoria Police. We will bring our fire services from systems and structures based on the 1950s into 2017.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

RETIREMENT OF CLERK

The SPEAKER — Order! Members will have received an email from me and the President in relation to the retirement of the much-respected Clerk of the Parliaments, Mr Ray Purdey. Mr Purdey has loyally served the Parliament as Clerk for 18 years, and his last day in the chamber will be on 22 June. I am sure there will be an opportunity, with the will of the house, to make a few remarks on his last day in the chamber.

Honourable members applauded.

PETITIONS

Following petition presented to house:

Croydon railway station car parking

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of Croydon Main Street Traders Association on behalf of Croydon residents and Metro Trains customers draws to the attention of the house their concerns regarding the lack of full day commuter car parking at Croydon station.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Andrews Labor government to alleviate the worsening parking situation at Croydon station by building a multistorey car park.

By Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (388 signatures).

Tabled.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Financial and performance outcomes 2015–16

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) presented report, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered that report and appendices be published.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 7

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) presented *Alert Digest No. 7 of 2017* on:

**City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017
Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous
Amendment Bill 2017
Sex Offenders Registration Amendment
(Miscellaneous) Bill 2017
State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017
Worksafe Legislation Amendment Bill 2017**

together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be published.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General — ICT Strategic Planning in the Health Sector — Ordered to be published

Crimes Act 1958 — Instrument of Authorisation under s 464Z

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Order under s 17B granting a licence over Alexandra Park

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — Notices under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rules 22, 23 (*Gazette G19, 11 May 2017*)

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 — Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Report on the 2016–17 Budget Estimates

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

Boroondara — C258, C260

East Gippsland — C130

Maroondah — C109

Mornington Peninsula — C205

Queenscliffe — C27

South Gippsland — C88

Whitehorse — C195

Whittlesea — C197

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — SR 29

Environment Protection Act 1970 — SR 28

Transfer of Land Act 1958 — SR 27

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

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

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Housing Act 1983 — Director of Housing determinations under s 142E

Meat Industry Act 1993:

Determining licence categories and fixing fees for meat processing facility licences

Fixing fees for a meat transport vehicle licence

Determining classes of licences and fixing fees for seafood safety licences.

The following proclamation fixing an operative date was tabled by the Clerk in accordance with an order of the house dated 24 February 2015:

Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017 — Whole Act — 1 July 2017 (*Gazette S150, 16 May 2017*).

ROYAL ASSENT

Messages read advising royal assent to:

16 May

**Electricity Safety Amendment (Bushfire Mitigation Civil Penalties Scheme) Bill 2017
Family Violence Protection Amendment Bill 2017**

Freedom of Information Amendment (Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner) Bill 2016

23 May

Building Amendment (Enforcement and Other Measures) Bill 2016.

APPROPRIATION MESSAGES

Message read recommending appropriation for State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Membership

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that I have received the resignation of Mr Danny O'Brien from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, effective 22 May 2017. I wish Mr O'Brien all the best and a speedy recovery from his illness.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — By leave, I move:

That Ms Staley be appointed a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Motion agreed to.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Questions without notice

The SPEAKER — Order! During question time on Thursday, 11 May, the member for Bayswater raised a point of order in relation to the responsiveness of an answer by the Premier to a supplementary question she had asked in relation to the oversight of Family Safety Victoria. Having reviewed the *Hansard* record and taken into account the information provided by the Premier in relation to both the substantive and supplementary questions, I conclude the Premier's answer was responsive.

MEMBER FOR GEMBROOK

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Education) — I desire to move, by leave:

That this house —

- (1) censures the member for Gembrook for his disgraceful comments about Black Saturday firefighters;

- (2) calls on the member to resign or be dismissed from the frontbench — —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, it is established practice that leave can be refused at any point, as was reaffirmed just recently. Normally some latitude is given to a person to enunciate their motion before a decision is made about leave, but at this stage on this side of the house we have heard enough to be clear that we wish to refuse leave, and when leave is refused that should be the end of the matter.

Ms Allan — On the point of order, Speaker, I can appreciate why the manager of opposition business is a little sensitive on this matter; however, it should not override the processes of this house. Indeed in recent sitting weeks we have had the situation in reverse, where those opposite were seeking leave. It was signalled early on that leave was going to be refused by the government; however, you allowed that motion to continue to be read in full. I would ask that that consistent approach be applied in this instance.

The SPEAKER — Order! Leave has been refused.
Leave refused.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5.00 p.m. on Thursday, 25 May 2017:

City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017

Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2017

Sex Offenders Registration Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2017

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017.

I will just make a few brief observations on the government business program that I have just moved today. Obviously it is a shorter week this week, which is why there are four bills for consideration. These are four bills that are across a range of matters relating to the budget, local government and the justice portfolio. I am sure members will be keen to get stuck into the debate, which is why I will keep my remarks short.

I would also like to note that I would be keen for further time to be devoted this week to the take-note motion of

the budget; however, that will depend on the amount of people who wish to speak on those other bills. I also note that the manager of opposition business has signalled that the opposition would be keen to see the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill taken into consideration in detail. I will consider that; it really will just be a question of time permitting to allow for speakers on those other bills and the take-note motion. The minister has indicated that she is happy to have that bill taken into consideration in detail, so perhaps we can accommodate a period of time over the course of tomorrow to accommodate that request from the opposition, which the government is happy to do should time permit.

The only other observation I would make is that there is a big program this week and next week, and I look forward to continuing to have discussions with members of the chamber about how the orderly running of the house can occur.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — The opposition opposes this government business program. Yet again there is no attempt by the government to deal with the scandal that hangs over this Parliament — the roting by the members for Tarneit and Melton. We have made this point time and time again previously, and we will continue to make it because it is a scandal and an outrage that behaviour by the former Speaker and Deputy Speaker of this Parliament is simply being swept under the carpet.

It has been brushed off as though it had never happened, as though it is a thing of the past, while those two members continue to sit in this chamber, continue to vote and take part in proceedings despite the serious case that has been found against them by virtue of the report of the Audit Committee that cries out for action, despite the lack of action being an affront to all the norms and standards that are normally observed in Westminster democracies, despite it being an affront to the practices and precedents of this house and in stark contrast to what happened under the previous government, when allegations were made about the former member for Frankston. They were, as appropriate, referred to the Privileges Committee of this Parliament. They were investigated and a report was made to this chamber, and after considering the recommendations of the Privileges Committee this house voted on a range of sanctions to apply to that member. Indeed when the member defied the resolution of the house, the then government sought to have that member expelled from the Parliament.

Nothing of that sort has happened in relation to the roting by the members for Tarneit and Melton even

though, particularly in the case of the member for Melton, all the available evidence points to this being a deliberately engineered artifice by that member to extract from the taxpayer money that he knew he was not entitled to receive. It is one of the most outrageous abuses of the position of a member of Parliament that could ever occur, and yet this house is being denied by the government the opportunity to do anything about it. The government is yet again refusing to deal with the notice of motion which has been given by the Leader of the Opposition to establish a select committee. Indeed it is refusing also to refer the matter to the Privileges Committee. This matter needs to be dealt with. It needs to be put right. For the Premier to say, 'Well, the police are looking at it, therefore matters are in hand' is, as he well knows, a complete contrivance to avoid accountability.

As occurred with the member for Frankston, police investigations could run in parallel with matters being considered by a committee of this house. If and when charges are laid against the members concerned, then at that point it becomes sub judice, but up to that point there is absolutely no reason why this house should not be dealing with the matter, as indeed happened with the member for Frankston. The now Premier, when he was Leader of the Opposition, repeatedly urged day after day that strong action be taken in relation to that member. The roting and abuse by the members for Tarneit and Melton in dollar terms far exceed what was involved with the member for Frankston. Certainly in the case of the member for Melton, on the available evidence it seems to be outright fraud, a deliberate contrivance and a complete affront to the standards of this house, and that matter should be dealt with. It is a disgrace that it has not been.

In relation to other aspects of the business program, the Leader of the House has given no indication as to whether the notice of motion given by the Deputy Premier is intended to be brought on for debate this week. If it is, that will further detract from the time that is available. The government has failed to schedule adequate sitting days, failed to sit three days this week and failed to sit three days in the budget week, and that is why there is a squeeze on available time. Of course we on this side of the house want to see the budget take-note motion debated, but that should not be at the expense of squeezing debate on other bills. In particular it should not be at the expense of preventing adequate consideration in detail of the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017. For all of those reasons we oppose the government business program.

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) — The government business program puts into effect the

budget the community has embraced, the media has welcomed and history will applaud because it protects women and children first, protects the community and public safety, and protects creating jobs against the relentless march of change. That is the strategy. That is the big-picture vision of this government, and that is what this government business program then provides the detailed bills to implement.

If we have a look at the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017, the manager of government business has already outlined the government will consider taking this bill into consideration in detail, which is what the opposition repeatedly calls for. That will be looked at. Then there is the motion to take note of the budget papers. Again, I hear the opposition supports the view that the take-note motion on the budget should be given time in the constricted week that we have, so there is a chance for every opposition member to have their say on the budget. I look forward to hearing their contributions about how well this budget has been received by the community.

Then we have the other detailed bills. We have the Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2017. We have the Sex Offenders Registration Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2017. Again, that is of great significance to the community in terms of protection against sex offenders. Then there is the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017 as well. Again, that provides an opportunity for members to debate the economic strategy of the government and what has been put into place when looking at taxes. Then we have the other issue that has been raised by the opposition. The Premier has outlined that police are investigating matters raised by the manager of opposition business, and that is how that issue is being addressed.

This is a shorter week than the normal sittings of the Parliament. Here is the key legislation that the government wants to deliver. The Victorian public are crying out for this because this is what the government does: it gets on with it. Here is the strategy, here is the funding and here is the implementation. That is what Victorians support overwhelmingly, and for that reason I recommend the government business program to the house.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) — Just briefly, as I have indicated in previous weeks, this house should be dealing with referring the members for Melton and Tarneit to the Privileges Committee or considering the proposal put forward by the opposition to refer them to the select committee. I think it is inappropriate to be moving onto this program without dealing with that. I believe the public would like to see this matter resolved and

addressed by this Parliament instead of letting it drag on. As I said in previous weeks, I think we should be dealing with that issue before dealing with these bills.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — I am delighted to join the debate on the government business program. What an outstanding government business program it is. What an absolute joy it is to be standing on this side of the house and being able to support a motion like this. Honestly, Speaker, I have not felt this joy since I was drinking at the Paris end of the Burvale Hotel on a payday. It is such a joy, Speaker.

Ms Thomas interjected.

Mr PEARSON — The member for Macedon says there is no Paris end at the Burvale Hotel. I advise the member that there is: it is near the Pubtab. I commend the government business program.

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I rise to speak on the government business program. The Nationals and the coalition are opposing this program for the reasons that the manager of opposition business outlined: there is unfinished business in this house, and there has been no attempt to deal satisfactorily with the scandal that is before the Parliament. The matter needs to be referred to places where it can be openly dealt with in a manner that is in keeping with the traditions of this house.

The bills before Parliament this week are the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017 — the goodies and baddies bill, the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017, the Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2017 and the Sex Offenders Registration Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2017. The State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017 in particular is a complex bill and one that is very important to the state. This should be the subject of strong and rigorous debate in this house. However, with this being a shortened week, this bill will not be dealt with as it should be and could be.

That brings us very much to the subject of the sitting of the house. We do need to have a timely response to all the budget issues. As the member for Brighton said so eloquently in the last sitting week, members' responses to the budget need to be timely. To have it drag on until nearly Christmas is really an embarrassment to this house.

What is the response that we need here? It is that we should have sat for the three days in budget week. This week should have been a three-day sitting week as well, because the program that is before us is unlikely to provide for time to debate the budget this week and we

are even less likely to have time for consideration in detail of the City of Geelong bill.

This is simply not good enough for the Parliament of this state, and it is not good enough for those we represent. The government needs to lead the way with these budget sittings to make sure that matters are dealt with in a timely way and in a way that gives justice to those we represent. The Nationals are opposing the business program.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 45

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Allan, Ms | Languiller, Mr |
| Andrews, Mr | Lim, Mr |
| Blandthorn, Ms | McGuire, Mr |
| Bull, Mr J. | Merlino, Mr |
| Carbines, Mr | Nardella, Mr |
| Couzens, Ms | Neville, Ms |
| D'Ambrosio, Ms | Noonan, Mr |
| Dimopoulos, Mr | Pakula, Mr |
| Donnellan, Mr | Pallas, Mr |
| Edbrooke, Mr | Pearson, Mr |
| Edwards, Ms | Perera, Mr |
| Eren, Mr | Richardson, Mr |
| Foley, Mr | Richardson, Ms |
| Garrett, Ms | Scott, Mr |
| Graley, Ms | Spence, Ms |
| Green, Ms | Staikos, Mr |
| Halfpenny, Ms | Suleyman, Ms |
| Hennessy, Ms | Thomas, Ms |
| Howard, Mr | Thomson, Ms |
| Hutchins, Ms | Ward, Ms |
| Kairouz, Ms | Williams, Ms |
| Kilkenny, Ms | Wynne, Mr |
| Knight, Ms | |

Noes, 39

| | |
|---------------|----------------|
| Angus, Mr | Northe, Mr |
| Asher, Ms | O'Brien, Mr M. |
| Battin, Mr | Paynter, Mr |
| Blackwood, Mr | Pesutto, Mr |
| Britnell, Ms | Riordan, Mr |
| Bull, Mr T. | Ryall, Ms |
| Burgess, Mr | Ryan, Ms |
| Clark, Mr | Sheed, Ms |
| Crisp, Mr | Smith, Mr R. |
| Dixon, Mr | Smith, Mr T. |
| Fyffe, Mrs | Southwick, Mr |
| Gidley, Mr | Staley, Ms |
| Guy, Mr | Thompson, Mr |
| Hibbins, Mr | Tilley, Mr |
| Hodgett, Mr | Victoria, Ms |
| Katos, Mr | Wakeling, Mr |
| Kealy, Ms | Walsh, Mr |
| McCurdy, Mr | Watt, Mr |
| McLeish, Ms | Wells, Mr |
| Morris, Mr | |

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Member for Gembrook

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Education) — I rise to relate to the house a story about the deep hurt caused by the member for Gembrook's misleading statements about firefighters on Black Saturday. On Friday I was at the integrated station at Craigieburn announcing our fire service reforms to a group of dedicated career and volunteer firefighters who love working closely together and who will continue to do so. Speaker, with respect, this is a personal story from a volunteer from that station, which she has given me permission to tell, and I quote:

The Craigieburn FCV was burnt out in the first few hours — it was part of a strike team involving both volunteer and career members of my brigade (Craigieburn CFA).

These members are still very traumatised, including my aunty.

Not to mention my husband, Daniel, who is a career firefighter but was volunteering at our best man's house that they lost in Wandong.

He would have no idea how scary it is to get a phone call from your newly married husband (we'd only been home from our honeymoon for four days) to tell you he loves you in case they don't make it. Daniel and I have both been awarded national emergency medals for our service during Black Saturday.

They are hard to wear because it is a constant reminder of the fear and sadness we witnessed and many of our colleagues struggle daily with!

Battin must resign.

Career firefighters and volunteer firefighters will never forget the comments of the member for Gembrook.

Income tax

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I am here in my capacity as the member for Brighton, and I note that postcode 3186, Brighton, is the fifth highest income tax paying suburb in Australia. It is also the highest income tax paying suburb in Victoria. I note the Labor Party's response to the recent federal budget, where the Labor Party has indicated to the community that it believes that a tax rate of 49.5 per cent is completely acceptable at the top end of the tax scale. It was with some interest that I picked up my copy of the *Australian* on the weekend and read some comments from the former Prime Minister Mr Keating, who said:

This —

meaning the 49.5 per cent tax level —

is too punitive a level, where the state is confiscating almost half of people's income over \$180 000.

It is not very often in my life I have agreed with Mr Keating, but on this occasion I do, because I agree with him that a tax rate of 49.5 per cent at the top end is way too high. I am very disappointed that the modern Labor Party has embarked on this policy of class warfare and has decided to reject elements of the federal coalition's budget that would seek to see some relief from this particular point of view. I think the modern Labor Party, with their class warfare, should come along and talk to some real Australians, who would tell them that this tax rate is too high.

Member for Gembrook

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — In February 2009 this chamber condoled the loss of 173 lives as a result of the devastating fires that ravaged our state. The fires of Black Saturday were unlike anything our state had ever seen. In this place members stood together representing their communities who were grieving; together in here we also grieved. Member after member spoke of loss and of bravery. They spoke of the courage shown by firefighters putting their lives at risk to save others. We heard of the remarkable response from all emergency services agencies and others like the Red Cross who had staff and volunteers working around the clock helping those who had lost homes, friends and family. Those contributions by members brought dignity to this place.

During the matter of public importance debate on Wednesday, 10 May, the member for Gembrook disgraced himself and showed no dignity in this place. His false comments, disparaging the professionalism of our firefighters on that most awful of days, have rightly been condemned. The member for Gembrook has exposed his true nature — as someone who will say anything no matter how false —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the House is now proceeding to impugn the member for Gembrook, in breach of standing order 118. I ask you to instruct her to comply with the standing order and not to make imputations against the member for Gembrook.

Ms ALLAN — On the point of order, Speaker, again I appreciate the sensitivity of those opposite on this matter; however, I was merely reflecting — sorry, I should not use the word 'reflecting'; that will upset the manager of opposition business. I was merely indicating how disrespectful the member for Gembrook's comments were and how I found them disrespectful and how the community has found them

disrespectful, and that is by no way straying into the standing order that the member has referred to.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members will be aware that imputations against other members are out of order. I do not view the comments that the Leader of the House has made to this point to be impugning the member, but I do remind all members on both sides of the house that it is disorderly to impugn any member of this place.

Ms ALLAN — The member for Gembrook exposed his true nature — as someone who will say anything no matter how false, how damaging, how disrespectful — on that day. It was a deplorable act and all done in the name of politics. The Leader of the Opposition has also shown his true nature by continuing to stand shoulder to shoulder by his man, accepting the standard that has been set by the member for Gembrook.

Country Fire Authority volunteers

Ms KEALY (Lowan) — The treatment and handling of Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers under the rule of the Andrews Labor government has been nothing less than appalling. We have seen vilification of volunteers and gutter politics by Labor MPs and the United Firefighters Union (UFU) to divide career and volunteer firefighters, and now there is a proposal to completely diminish and disregard the important role of our volunteer firefighters whom we rely on to protect our people and property.

The recent announcement to split CFA volunteers from paid staff will kill the CFA as we know it. The impact of this decision strikes well beyond Melbourne. This is a serious concern for everyone in rural and regional Victoria. One of the concerns that has been raised with me includes the diminished role of CFA volunteers in metropolitan areas. These are vital volunteers that are fully trained and there to help provide extra manpower, known as surge capacity, during bushfire events such as the recent fires in the Grampians, Little Desert, Big Desert and Wyperfeld national parks.

Without access to this manpower and with fewer resources, local fires will be harder to battle and more damage will result. The reporting structure has completely changed, so now complaints against volunteers will be heard by Fire Rescue Victoria and the UFU rather than the CFA and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, as is currently the case. There will be no-one representing volunteers in the room. This does not offer a fair hearing or support for volunteers and is just wrong.

With the UFU right of veto still proposed to be in place it is no great leap to believe that funding decisions for buildings and appliances will be prioritised for areas where there are paid firefighters — UFU members over volunteer brigades. This is an appalling treatment of our volunteers, who offer their time and take great risks to protect our property and people, all due to their commitment to give back to the community.

On 15 June 2016 the Premier stated:

This dispute had to come to an end and I ended it.

Premier, you have shown complete and utter disrespect for local CFA volunteers. You have failed to consult with volunteers or listen to their concerns. This is just the beginning.

Member for Gembrook

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) — I am very proud to be a member of this place representing 38 volunteer Country Fire Authority brigades and three State Emergency Service units. It has been my privilege to join with these volunteers at brigade and unit meetings, social events, fundraisers, tank and equipment handovers, and medal presentations over my time as a member of this place.

Across my electorate the people of Macedon have faced adversity on many occasions. The Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 saw seven lives tragically lost in my community, and for many the memory of this terrible fire still haunts them. More recently we have seen significant fires in Riddells Creek, Darraweit Guim and Lancefield. Of course we all remember the horror of Black Saturday. The people of my community will never forget that despite the best efforts of our emergency services workers, career and volunteer, 173 Victorians lost their lives on that day.

At this point I want to acknowledge the member for Yan Yean and the member for Frankston, volunteer and career firefighters respectively, both of whom put their lives on the line on that day to protect others. It is against this backdrop that I call on the Leader of the Opposition to immediately sack the member for Gembrook for lying in this place about the contribution of career firefighters on that day.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the member is breaching standing order 118 in making false accusations about the member for Gembrook, accusing him of dishonesty and misrepresenting remarks which were actually extolling the capacity of volunteers. I ask you to instruct her to comply with standing order 118.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier further on this point of order, in silence.

Mr Merlino — On the point of order, Speaker, the member for Gembrook clearly misled this Parliament, claiming that career firefighters were not on the fireground for 5½ hours. He then doubled up the very next day and claimed he was talking about the Bunyip Ridge fire. Again, wrong, wrong, wrong! These were hurtful comments that career and volunteer firefighters will never forget.

The SPEAKER — Order! The rulings and precedents of this place are very clearly set out in the latest edition of *Rulings from the Chair*. It does set out very clearly that the use of the word 'lie', or variants of that word, is an imputation against a member and imputations are disorderly. Over several months now those standards have been slipping and the debate in this chamber has not been in accordance with those rules. Members on both sides of the house should reflect on the language that they use about other members of this house, no matter how strongly they feel about an issue. I uphold the point of order. I ask the member for Macedon not to impugn another member.

Ms THOMAS — Thank you, Speaker. By using the tragedy of Black Saturday to continue to fuel a false war between career and volunteer firefighters the member for Gembrook has shown that he is unfit to hold the position of shadow minister, unworthy to speak on behalf of emergency services workers, be they career or volunteer, and unworthy of a place on the opposition frontbench. The member for Gembrook has shown contempt for this place.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Rowville.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Without the assistance of the Deputy Premier.

Mr Wells — On a point of order, Speaker, I think it was the member for Monbulk who promised volunteers that he would bring in presumptive rights legislation within 100 days. That was my point of order.

The SPEAKER — Order! Continue your contribution. There is no point of order.

Victims of crime support service

Mr WELLS (Rowville) — This statement is to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister for Police, Edward O’Donohue in the Legislative Council, on their recent announcement to establish a victims support rapid response service. The victims support rapid response service, an Australian first, is a much-needed victims immediate support service that will fill an important hole in the range of services currently provided to victims in Victoria. The proposed service addresses the contemporary needs of victims and builds on the scope of the original victims of crime crisis support program policy that the Liberal-Nationals proposed when in government at the 2014 state election.

The 2014 coalition policy was the culmination of some excellent work and consultation by a former member for Kew, Andrew McIntosh, in close consultation with the highly respected former Victorian police senior chaplain, the Reverend Jim Pilmer, PSM. The concept is to ensure that victims and police that are supporting the homicide squad and major collision units have the support that is required. The government led by the member for Bulleen will ensure that this is delivered, if elected in 2018.

Firefighters

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I rise in this place this morning to thank the Deputy Premier and Minister for Emergency Services for visiting the Eltham integrated station last Saturday and taking all questions from career firefighters and volunteers collectively. These firefighters were not just from the Eltham integrated station but also from the neighbouring Diamond Creek brigade, where I have been a member and have served over many years, the Wattle Glen brigade, the Plenty brigade and many others.

This was a very long conversation, very measured, very respectful. This was in stark contrast to the frontbencher who holds that portfolio in opposition, the member for Gembrook. I did serve on Black Saturday. I served in a truck with my crew leader, who was, and still is, a career firefighter. He is a life member of the volunteer brigade that I am part of, and he saved lives. He is just one of many. Callum Donoghue and Matt Collins were in a house with 17 people in Strathewen, at the home of Barry Tulley, a volunteer. Callum Donoghue and Matt Collins were Metropolitan Fire Brigade career firefighters. They saved those 17 lives that day, together with volunteers. It is beyond contempt to divide us. We will not be divided.

Benambra electorate roads

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — Last week I was in Tallangatta, in the Towong shire, as part of my regular visits to the towns in the Benambra district. It came a day after a public meeting about the impact of losing 150 jobs from Murray Goulburn’s nearby Kiewa milk processing plant.

We all know, and particularly in my area, that country folk are resilient types, but the impact of this closure is far reaching. It is not just about jobs; it will also impact infrastructure. Country roads are collapsing under a state government that fails to provide enough money to rural councils to maintain gravel and bitumen road networks that in this case are more than 1200 kilometres long. Towong would welcome the return of the coalition’s annual \$1 million Country Roads and Bridges Fund.

The Kiewa plant closure puts more pressure on roads not just in the Upper Murray area but also in Wodonga and Indigo shires. Those roads will now conservatively carry about 5000 additional milk trucks as they take about 165 million litres of milk from the alpine valleys to Cobram each year. That is approximately an extra 28 heavy combination vehicles alone each day, every day, through the narrow and dangerous main street of Rutherglen, which is waiting for its heavy vehicle bypass. That excludes the brought-in feed and all other road freight. I am aware that Indigo shire is looking at adding a back road to carry the trucks around Rutherglen, but it fears the cost of this extra burden will now be beyond that carriageway. It will certainly be beyond these councils’ limited road budgets. The funding that is available to them should not be sent off to back roads.

Member for Gembrook

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) — As a former firefighter who worked at the Bunyip State Park fire on Black Saturday, I am appalled at the member for Gembrook’s recent comments, which reflected badly on members of my community. The only thing more appalling is that the Leader of the Opposition has fully supported his shadow minister victimising firefighters who put their lives on the line during Australia’s worst natural disaster. So shameful was the shadow minister that he actually challenged the Minister for Emergency Services to tell him the number of career firefighters on the ground in the first 5½ hours of Black Saturday, thereafter proudly telling us it was zero.

After hearing about this, the *Weekly Times* named the member for Gembrook their ‘Dill of the week’, and

3AW broadcast that it was a dumb and stupid thing to say. I wonder what they would say if they found out that this had been a constant dialogue against firefighters. Talking about zero, I will tell the member what zero represents — the number of firefighters he actually speaks for.

He must go, because he has not said this just once; he has made this statement no less than three times in this Parliament before making a fourth inaccurate Bunyip State Park fire excuse. There is no confusing what he meant or the motivation behind those words. There is no arguing the meaning of those deliberate statements. He misled our Parliament and our community at least four times on this one issue alone, and he constantly does so on other issues. They say, 'Once may be a mistake, twice is a lapse, three times is a choice'. What exactly is four times? I would say that four times is defamatory. It is motivated by malice and an ulterior purpose.

What becomes of Parliament if we allow a shadow minister to mislead it with no consequences —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Without the assistance of the member for Footscray.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the member is now proceeding to breach standing order 118 by making imputations against the member for Gembrook, accusing him of dishonesty and improper motives and misrepresenting a statement that actually extolled the capacities of volunteers. I ask you to instruct the member to comply with standing order 118.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before restarting the clock, I remind members of my earlier ruling that imputations are disorderly, and that applies to both sides of the house. The member for Frankston to continue.

Mr EDBROOKE — It is simple: either the Leader of the Opposition sacks the shadow Minister for Emergency Services or their caucus sacks them both.

Shepparton street art mural

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) — Yesterday I was privileged to attend the official launch of Shepparton's first Aboriginal street art mural, which is a collaborative project between Greater Shepparton City Council, artist Matt Adnate, Rumbalara cooperative, Yorta Yorta nation and Goulburn Valley Water. It was an inspiring event that pays tribute to two heroic community leaders

who worked endlessly not only for the rights of Aboriginal people but also for the betterment of humanity and their own communities.

Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls and William Cooper have been recognised and honoured in a spectacular mural in the heart of Shepparton. Nathan Lovett-Murray, prominent AFL footballer and great-grandson of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls, gave a fitting speech detailing his great-grandfather's triumphs. Lovett-Murray recalled his great-grandfather's wise words and recited one of his most profound quotes:

You can play a tune on black keys, you can play a tune on white keys, but both are needed for perfect harmony.

This week the AFL community celebrates the life and achievements of Sir Doug in an annual round it has named in his honour.

William Cooper's life achievements, like Sir Doug's, are too numerous to mention, but what must be said is that his relentless activism and advocacy for human rights and his own Aboriginal community is widely recognised.

It was an honour to be in attendance at what was really a watershed event for Shepparton and our region, along with the descendants of these two extraordinary Yorta Yorta men and with many Aboriginal representatives from across Victoria.

Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre

Mr HOWARD (Buninyong) — On Monday I was pleased to be joined by the Minister for Emergency Services and Craig Lapsley at Ballarat city fire station, where they were able to explain proposed changes to the management of our fire services, and last week I was pleased to have the minister and Mr Lapsley visit Ballan to announce the purchase of land there for the new Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre. The new \$31 million training centre will be a state-of-the-art facility for all Victorian emergency services workers. It is critical that we make sure that the people who protect our communities are able to do their work with the best skills and equipment in order to maximise their own safety on the job.

Since the closure of Fiskville in 2015 we have been working hard with Moorabool Shire Council and the local community to secure this 35-hectare site, which brings over \$30 million of investment into Ballan. The Andrews government is determined to support the Ballan community and ensure that our emergency services

personnel can continue to get the training that they need at a safe world-class training facility in our region.

This is in contrast to the Liberals, who through their emergency services spokesperson, the member for Gembrook, have focused their efforts on insulting our brave career firefighters who protected our state in our most challenging moment on Black Saturday. Instead of trying to drive a wedge between our career firefighters and volunteers, it is time that the Liberals finally stood up to support all of our fire services personnel, both career and volunteer, who do day-to-day work to support — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Morwell.

Latrobe Valley economy

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — Just weeks ago Hazelwood power station closed its doors, leaving hundreds of workers without a job, and then just last week Carter Holt Harvey, the owners of a Morwell timber mill, also announced that they intended to shut their plant. This is another unprecedented and earth-shattering blow to the Latrobe Valley community, with a further 160 hardworking men and women soon to be unemployed due to the closure of the Carter Holt Harvey mill. This will hit the entire community unimaginably hard. In some cases three members of the one family worked at the mill, the longest being for 28 years. This is just one case of 160 workers about to suffer the burden of finding a new job while the unemployment rate sits at 11.2 per cent in the Latrobe Valley, an increase of 50 per cent under this state government. This unsatisfactory unemployment rate is even before the loss of jobs at Hazelwood station or Carter Holt Harvey is factored in.

Latrobe Valley braces for another harsh and unyielding hit to its economy and the livelihoods of so many. Many remain bewildered as to why the Andrews government has accepted the fact that it cannot save the mill, but is prepared to intervene at Australian Sustainable Hardwoods in Heyfield and Alcoa in Portland. Yet with the mill it sits on its hands and does nothing, just as it did with Hazelwood. These actions, as far as we are concerned, are just proof that this Premier and the government are very willing to say they will fight for every Victorian job, but when it comes down to the fulfilment of this promise they are nowhere to be seen. This is just a hollow promise from a hollow government for the Latrobe Valley community.

Member for Gembrook

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) — Eight years ago our state changed forever. Black Saturday saw 173 people lose their lives and thousands of people touched forever and living on with the scars of that horrific occasion. We saw career and volunteer firefighters serve together side by side with their communities, protecting our state. There was no differentiation on that day. It was about how we protected life and property together. It was not about the badge, it was about saving life and property, and that is what it should always be.

To come into this place as the shadow Minister for Emergency Services and politicise Black Saturday on more than three occasions is deplorable. It is disgusting, and it vilified good people who serve our community time and time again. The challenge now is for the Leader of the Opposition to detail to this Parliament and to all Victorians whether he stands by those comments and whether he supports the comments that there were no career firefighters serving on that day for 5½ hours, because if he does have confidence and he supports those comments, he supports the further division and vilification of our career and volunteer firefighters. It is not about politics, it is about the service of our community, and that is what our volunteer and career firefighters did on that day. We should honour them, not vilify them.

Fire services

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — The announcement last week by the Andrews government to effectively break up the Country Fire Authority (CFA), broaden the involvement of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade into peri-urban areas and strengthen the influence of career firefighters in regional areas has been introduced with absolutely no consultation with the 57 000 volunteers that have kept our communities safe for decades.

Despite the claims by the ministers, the Deputy Premier and some of his Labor colleagues, there has been no consultation with volunteer brigades on the proposal to completely separate career and volunteer firefighters into two distinctly individual organisations. In fact it has been reported to me that the member for Eastern Victoria, Harriet Shing, recently attended a Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) meeting in my local area, and when questioned about the proposal to break up the CFA she refused to answer questions.

The claims of consultation are just another Labor lie. The Premier's blatant disregard for the potential impact

of his plan, which in actual fact is blatant unmitigated disrespect for country communities and their safety, is an absolute disgrace. I have met with a number of CFA volunteers in recent days, and the unanswered questions they have are a clear indication that no consultation has taken place.

Concerns regarding funds raised by volunteers for essential equipment is a major issue. In one instance over \$400 000 has been raised by volunteers from the local community specifically for a new Hazmat vehicle. That vehicle will now become the property and be in the control of the proposed new entity, Fire Rescue Victoria.

There is absolutely no justification for creating two separate entities to provide fire safety, with one having superiority over the other, when the CFA as a combined career and volunteer firefighting force has been so successful in maintaining community safety for decades.

Country Fire Authority Kangaroo Flat brigade

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) — I was pleased and honoured to attend the Kangaroo Flat Country Fire Authority (CFA) annual dinner and awards night on Saturday night. Kangaroo Flat CFA is a proud volunteer brigade with over 150 years of history protecting Kangaroo Flat and the broader community. I want to acknowledge and congratulate all of the service award recipients and make special mention of a few.

Tommy Guilmartin received his 70-year service medal. Tommy joined the brigade as a teenager and has seen enormous change in his community over time. When Tommy joined the brigade the population of Kangaroo Flat was 900. Today it is 10 000.

Bill Bowery, a former captain of the brigade, received his Australian Fire Service Medal a couple of weeks ago. Bill is a stalwart of the brigade, and now in his 80s is still visiting schools and community events in his role as a community educator.

Captain Adam Melis and Andrew Smith both received life memberships of the brigade and the CFA, and David Dargaville, a former champion runner, received his 45-year service medal. David's three children are also members and carry on the success at the CFA championships. Congratulations and thank you to all members.

While we celebrate the longevity and success of the Kangaroo Flat CFA, let us not forget all the men and women of our fire services who do an amazing and brave job across our state. It is shameful that there are

those on the opposite side of the house, like the member for Gembrook, who choose to denigrate and insult them by making false claims and using Victoria's most horrendous tragedy, Black Saturday, for political point-scoring and to create division and fear within our fire services. Shame on you.

Land tax

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I place on record the concerns of Sandringham electorate residents regarding the massive hike in the land tax burden being borne by self-funded retirees, small business proprietors, struggling retailers and other property owners. The increase in land tax will force many retirees to restructure their investments to eliminate the effect of bracket creep or leave the domestic market rental while retailers are forced out of business as a result of not being able to meet the increase in land tax.

There is an urgent demand in Victoria for there to be an adjustment to the land tax scale to avert the massive hike in the land tax burden which has increased disproportionately to rental returns.

Beach Road cyclists

Mr THOMPSON — I note with concern the proposed action by the Kingston council to reduce the width of Beach Road. According to a leading Australian cyclist:

It is ludicrous that the Kingston council proposes to narrow Beach Road ...

Narrowing Beach Road will cause chaos for cyclists, motorists and anybody parking a vehicle including beachgoers.

Beach Road is one of the busiest thoroughfares for cyclists in Australia if not the world and I find it quite staggering that they are trying to make cyclists go elsewhere or drivers go elsewhere.

Also, there was a statement issued by the Amy Gillett Foundation, and I quote:

The Amy Gillett Foundation is all about safe cycling and any proposal to narrow existing road infrastructure in a manner that will compromise safe cycling is not supported.

Beach Road is a renowned cycling precinct of national significance and the safety of all road users including cyclists needs to be prioritised.

Member for Gembrook

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) — First of all, I just want to mention that volunteer Country Fire Authority (CFA) trucks will not be transferred to Fire Rescue Victoria, especially donated funds. So what was

said by a previous speaker in this chamber was an absolute lie. We should be appalled and not surprised by the member for Gembrook's cowardly attacks on our firefighters, and the lies and stories he has told the Parliament and Victorians. This is not —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as ruled by the Speaker on two previous occasions during member statements, allegations of deliberate dishonesty against any member are a breach of standing order 118. The allegations against the member for Gembrook are also untrue, and I ask you to instruct the member to comply with standing orders.

Ms HALFPENNY — I withdraw the word 'lies'.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Thomastown has withdrawn.

Ms HALFPENNY — This is not the first time he has demonstrated his contempt for our firefighters — the people that protect us and save our lives and our homes, putting their lives on the line. The member for Gembrook was a member of the committee that I chaired, charged by this Parliament with the job of investigating the chemical contamination and subsequent cover-up at the CFA training site at Fiskville. The member for Gembrook resigned very early in the inquiry, saying he was too busy to do this work — too busy to investigate the CFA cover-up of the chemical contamination at Fiskville and how the CFA volunteers, their families, local schoolchildren and farmers were exposed to the highly toxic and poisonous chemicals.

It was an inquiry that involved all sides of politics, and its report found that the CFA management and successive board members knowingly exposed volunteers and others to dangerous chemicals that cause cancer and serious illness. But this is not all. The member for Gembrook's resignation because he was too busy was also surrounded by controversy as he was accused of leaking a personal and confidential submission of a former CFA member. It is this Labor government that has acted on the Fiskville scandal and acted on presumptive rights legislation.

Minister for Education

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) — I condemn the Minister for Education for misleading not only the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) hearings last week but also the Victorian public. In a media release issued by this government when in opposition in November 2014, the headline was 'No more asbestos in

Victorian schools under Labor'. The first sentence followed on by saying:

An Andrews Labor government will set a goal for all Victorian government schools to be asbestos free by 2020.

Then the Minister for Education in 2015 said he did not know how much it will cost to remove asbestos from state schools, despite promising to eradicate the dangerous material from classrooms by 2020. But to take the cake, last week in PAEC the minister said:

Mr Morris, our election commitment was never that, and it would just be farcical.

We have a Minister for Education that is misleading PAEC and misleading the Victorian public. This Labor government never once had any intention of removing asbestos from Victorian schools by 2020, and he is not going to do it. He should come out and say that it was a false and misleading statement prior to the last election. It continues to be false and misleading. This government is incompetent. This Minister for Education is incompetent.

Member for Gembrook

Ms WARD (Eltham) — I read the words of a career firefighter on Black Saturday:

I was off duty. Because of expected weather conditions, I was, however, working at 0700 hours crewing an MFB strike team.

When the Bunyip Ridge fire broke containment lines, my strike team was deployed to protect Drouin. This concerned me as my parents lived there.

During the firefight, another SSO and I rescued a man from a house fire. He was severely burnt with sheets of skin hanging off his body.

We requested ambulance but were advised it was too dangerous for crews to respond to fire front.

We put him into the back of our car and drove through fire to Drouin fire station and the ambos. I still don't know if he survived. We went back to the fire front to fight multiple fires.

Drouin was saved thanks to aggressive firefighting and a wind change.

Around 1.00 a.m. I was relieved by fresh crews. One of my colleagues said to get home to Healesville quickly, as it was under threat.

We'd lost phone service and I didn't know of the Kilmore fire.

Driving home I continually called my wife, unsuccessfully.

Coming into the Yarra Valley I saw a war zone. Not hearing from my family, I'll be honest, I feared the worst.

Finally getting home, it was still standing, fire creeping down the hill, looters on my verandah who shot through on motorbikes as I pulled up.

Eventually I got on to my wife who had wisely taken the kids and pets to her sister's place before the highway was cut off.

My kids heard Mr Battin in Parliament; they asked me how he can lie and not be in trouble. They reminded me they didn't see me for six days immediately after Black Saturday. They reminded me of my deployments over the next five weeks.

I couldn't answer.

Mr Battin's callous lies have brought back some of the demons I've tried hard to forget. Some of the things firefighters saw and had to do, no human should be exposed to — —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, whether a quote or not, the member is now making allegations of deliberate dishonesty against another member, in breach of standing order 118. I ask you to instruct her to comply with the standing orders and to not misrepresent a member whose remarks were extolling the achievements of volunteers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I reiterate the Speaker's ruling this morning that we will not be impugning members in the chamber. The word 'lie' is not acceptable.

Ms WARD — They continue:

Some of the things firefighters saw and had to do, no human should be exposed to, but we were.

The next time Mr Battin thinks it might be a political winner to attack firefighters, I hope he understands the real damage his — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Great South West Dairy Awards

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) — Last Wednesday my local dairy industry gathered for the Great South West Dairy Awards, a concept I am proud to have helped develop while I was chair of WestVic Dairy as a way to acknowledge the contribution dairy makes to the south-west region's economy.

Seventy per cent of farm businesses now employ outside the family, and the awards aim to highlight those who are at the forefront of the industry with a gala dinner that attracts the who's who of dairy. The concept was developed in 2005 with a focus on the employer of the year and has grown to now include awards for environmental managers and business managers and a photo competition which attracts some stunning entries.

From my electorate, awards were presented to Isaac and Michelle Johnstone, Todd and Maddie Leddin, Peter and Fiona Musson and Jess Fleming. There were also several awards presented to farmers from the Polwarth electorate, and it was great to have the member for Polwarth in attendance.

There is no doubt it has been a tough year in the dairy industry, an industry which contributes so much to the Victorian economy, so it is disappointing to see in the budget that not one dollar set aside for regional infrastructure from the port of Melbourne lease will be of benefit to the dairy industry in South-West Coast. This industry helped build the port of Melbourne, and dairy is the biggest exporter out of the port. What a perfect example of the government's lack of commitment to the dairy industry.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2016–17

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) — I want to refer to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into the budget estimates 2016–17, particularly in relation to the contribution by the Minister for Industry and Employment, who referred to how working in a coordinated fashion presents an opportunity to drive strategic advantage from that collaboration. I want to continue my contribution on this important matter, particularly not just in relation to the Victorian government but also in relation to how we deal with the Australian government.

The specific reference I want to address today is what has happened with the allocation from the Australian government regarding the national proton beam therapy centre and where that should be located. Medical research is one of Victoria's proudest and best sectors. We are regarded internationally as a world leader. Medical research is one of the highest priorities of the Andrews government, so the sector has been shocked and absolutely dismayed by the federal government's decision to make an allocation of \$68 million to put the proton beam headquarters for Australia not in Melbourne but in Adelaide.

I will put this in the context of how the funding works. Victoria has 25 per cent of the population. Where politics is played on infrastructure, we get less than 8 per cent of the contribution. Where politics is not played because there is an independent assessment from the National Health and Medical Research Council on medical research, Victoria gets more than 40 per cent of the funding. That is on merit, that is on

performance, and that is on the institutions that have been established over a long period of time in Victoria.

I want to put this into context. Proton beams are important because they kill cancer cells while avoiding many of the adverse side effects of chemotherapy. Victoria is regarded as an international leader, and we saw last year the Andrews government open the \$1 billion jewel in Australia's medical research crown, the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre. We offered to partner America and then President Barack Obama's call for a new moonshot, the quest to cure cancer — and the White House came to Melbourne, not to Adelaide. The White House came to Melbourne through then Vice-President Joe Biden, who signed a series of agreements with the Premier and the Minister for Health, who is in the chamber right now.

After advocating for this initiative as Victoria's first Parliamentary Secretary for Medical Research, I had the honour to build closer relationships with leading American institutions on cancer research, including proton beam technology. The Minister for Health did this in Europe as well. Victoria had an offer of \$50 million on the table to get the proton beam national centre established here. I therefore call on the federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, to release all advice on the proton beam project, especially from Australia's chief scientist, because this decision smacks of the triumph of politics over rational decision-making. The advice needs to be revealed as a matter of urgency because there is up to \$20 billion at stake in the medical research fund.

When independent experts make the decisions on merit, Victoria receives the lion's share of the funding — so the lion's share goes to the lion. That is what we have done in Victoria: lead in this category, in this sector, for generations — and it has been bipartisan. So I want to hear from the coalition members as well on what their support is for Victoria's position to actually have this money to take this leadership.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business. The member for Broadmeadows will have the call when we resume government business.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

MANCHESTER TERRORIST ATTACK

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) (*By leave*) — It should have been a night of celebration, a night of music and memories — daughters, sons, many of them enjoying the thrill of their very first concert. Instead it was a

night of carnage. And while all terrorism is evil, as a parent I can think of nothing crueller, nothing more evil, nothing more inhumane in fact than deliberately targeting children.

So far we know that 22 lives have been lost, with many more who are still injured — many of them very, very seriously injured. All Victorians are thinking of them and their loved ones, too. It is in their honour that tonight our city's most prominent markers — the state library, the Melbourne town hall and the arts centre spire — will be lit in the colours of the Union Jack. It is also a reminder that even in our darkest hour there will be light. There will be light for those who have been lost and those who love them.

Despite the horror of yesterday, there will be defiant heroes as well: dedicated emergency services workers who, without a moment of hesitation, rushed to the scene; and ordinary people, too, who, quite literally, opened their doors to strangers. And in the hours since, Manchester hospitals have reported that their blood banks are full. Such is the generosity of spirit and action that we are seeing in that part of England, because although terror might target the things we hold most sacred, it will not rob us of our spirit, it will not rob us of our decency. Today we are thinking of the people of Manchester. We share their burden of grief and, just as they have, we stand tall in the face of terror.

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) (*By leave*) — I am appalled at the vision I have seen coming out of Manchester in the last 24 hours. It is gut-wrenching, heartbreaking and totally appalling. As an individual and as a father I cannot begin to comprehend what so many families are going through with, in many cases, the loss of a child, or the loss of friends, or the extraordinary anguish from what so many people saw at the Manchester Arena just a day or so ago.

Manchester is a great English city. Many, many people in this country have family who come from or still live in Manchester in the West Midlands metropolitan area. Manchester lived through and survived incessant bombing from the Nazis in World War II. Like many cities, it was shaken, but its people are stronger and their resolve is greater than any bomb or any ideology that sought to take their freedom. Like those attacks, this attack is yet another by people who want to take away the lives and freedom of peace-loving people.

What has tragically happened in Manchester is what is becoming all too common an occurrence across Europe. I hear some people saying that life should go on as normal post attacks like this. No, life does not go on as normal when 22 innocent people, mainly

children, lose their lives to a suicide bomber supported by religious fascism. ISIS, the so-called Islamic State, is a religious fascist organisation. It has claimed responsibility for this attack. Its weapon is terror. Its target is anyone who does not adhere to its medieval and false interpretation of the Islamic faith. It is up to all of us whether we have a faith of not — whether we are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Baha'i, Sikh, Buddhist or whatever — to stand up to religious fascism and say that life will not go on as normal until we rid this extremism from the lands of people who desire peace.

This is not a statement about religion; it is a statement about survival. People who want peace, who want others to experience and live in peace, sometimes need to stand up for it and for the memory of those lost at this tragic time in Manchester. Every peace-loving person in the world must recognise this and do this, and every Parliament like this one should be resolute that we will not rest, that life will not be normal, until peace and the rule of one law for all is what governs all of us. The families, the friends and those left behind or those who will continue to suffer after what has happened in Manchester deserve no less.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (*By leave*) — I rise to express my condolences for the lives lost in the terrorist attack in Manchester. Manchester is one of the few cities outside Melbourne that I have been lucky enough to live in and call home, and while my time there was relatively short, it is a city that I will always know and love. It is a city full of passionate people who care deeply about the things that give Manchester its identity — about social justice, about football, about music and even Corrie. It is a city that, like Melbourne, celebrates its ethnic diversity and its LGBTI communities and it is a city that is now hurting and is now coming together.

It is so saddening that we are here again mourning lives lost and condemning a terrorist attack that, whatever the hate-filled motivation, will never achieve what the attacker wants, while 22 people — young children with so much more to give and with family and friends who love them — have been killed, with many more injured or witnesses to terror. I offer my deepest condolences to those who died, who were injured and who lost loved ones. To everyone in Manchester and to all Mancunians, we are with you.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask all members to rise in their places as a mark of respect and condolence for those who were lost in Manchester.

Honourable members stood in their places.

The SPEAKER — Order! Thank you, members. I thank the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Prahran for their eloquent comments. With the leave of the house, I think we should forward those remarks to our friends at Westminster.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Victims of crime support

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Decorated war veteran Ken Handford was brutally murdered on the eve of his 90th birthday in September 2015 by ice addict Jonathon Cooper. Mr Handford's death has obviously left his family grieving and seeking justice. Seven members of Mr Handford's family, including his grandchildren, have been denied any support from the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal and have had no support from the government. They have even been told they have to prove their link to Mr Handford.

Premier, will you today give a guarantee to this family that you will intervene and provide yet another family devastated by violent crime the support they deserve but still do not have?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Obviously we are all very careful about the language we use around this case. Of course I understand that the Director of Public Prosecutions is either further considering — —

Mr Pakula interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — In fact the Attorney-General confirms for me just across the chamber that an appeal has been lodged against the sentence. I do not want to say anything — none of us do, I am sure — that might put at jeopardy justice being served in this matter. Beyond that though can I say to the Leader of the Opposition that if there is support that can be provided to this family that has not been provided, I am more than happy to ask my department to make enquiries as soon as possible to see what might be able to be done. The last thing any of us would want, I am sure, would be people who clearly are having to live with the pain of that tragic loss; they should be getting any and all support that we can provide. I am happy to look into that matter, and perhaps our officers can confirm that outside the chamber. I am more than happy to engage with the Leader of the Opposition on that if he has any further information that he wants to provide to me.

In broader terms though can I say that the Attorney-General and I were very proud to make some announcements as part of the budget around additional support for victims of crime. They are not costs; they are profound investments in a fairer Victoria, a more just Victoria, and we look forward to rolling out each and every one of those important elements, fully funded and delivered under this year's budget. Again our thoughts are with the Handford family, but what is more, action needs to be there as well, and if there is more we can do, then I will set about making sure that that happens.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — I respect the Premier's comments around announcements in the budget around a fairer or more just Victoria, but I again repeat for the Handford family, who are watching this today: seven members, including the grandchildren, have been asked to prove their link to their grandfather. For the third time, Premier, I have had to ask directly on behalf of a family for support from the government in this chamber following violent crime. Premier, how many more families have to suffer before you change the criminal justice system from excuse-making for criminals to putting victims of crime like the Handford family first?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. I do not think there is any need for us to quarrel about these matters. This family should be treated — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS — Three bills have just been introduced today.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS — Some may want to quarrel about these matters. I am absolutely prepared, and I will commit, to providing additional support and making inquiries about the provision of additional support to this family. We do not want people getting the run-around, we do not want people having to be re-traumatised through a compensation process. That is why there were changes funded and delivered in the budget. If there is more we can do for this family, I will make inquiries once question time has concluded. If there is further information that the Leader of the Opposition wants to provide me with, I would be most pleased to receive it.

Ministers statements: firefighters presumptive rights legislation

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I want to update the house on the government's initiatives in relation to protecting those who keep us safe — those who work so very hard every hour of every shift, every call-out, in every brigade, career and volunteer, right across our state. Some of those people, because of their courage, because of their service and because of the fact that they run towards the danger rather than away from it, get sick. They finish up contracting some forms of cancer.

Science tells us this, and it has done for quite some time, but not everybody has been convinced of that logic and of those facts. But the government I am proud to lead has more than a press release to show for its convictions and its values. We are going to get this done, and we are going to make sure that volunteers and career firefighters who get sick because of the work they do to keep us safe are given the support, the justice and the decency that they have earned. They will be treated with respect and they will be given the support that they are entitled to.

There are of course other alternatives to that approach. You could, for instance, deny the link between some forms of cancer and firefighting. You could, for instance, peddle mistruths. You could peddle inaccuracies and call into question the commitment of career firefighters on, for instance, Black Saturday.

Those who serve our community proudly wear medals — medals like the ones the member for Frankston is wearing. They are for service to the community. If there were medals given out for lying about Black Saturday, a member opposite would have a chest full of them.

Fire services

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is again to the Premier. The volunteer charter enshrined by legislation that you supported in 2011 and section 6G(c) of the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 require that the government and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) consult with the CFA's volunteer representative body, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), on behalf of volunteer officers and members on any matter that might be reasonably expected to affect them. Premier, before announcing legislation to tear apart the CFA and abolish the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), did you consult with the VFBV, or did you go against the charter and break the law?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He apparently has some serious process concerns with these matters. That is the extent of his critique. I wonder, did the Leader of the Opposition consult with the VFBV when they cut the CFA budget? Did he consult with them on that? Did he consult with the VFBV when the then minister for emergency services was at the tennis?

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance. It was a very simple question about whether the Premier followed the volunteer charter that he agreed to. Did he consult with the VFBV before he announced legislation to split the CFA and scrap the MFB?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier has only been answering the question for a short time, but I do ask him to come back to answering the question.

Mr ANDREWS — There have been eight reviews — not one, not two, not three, but eight of them — in as many years. The time for talking about reform is over. The time for cutting budgets is over. The time for playing politics with our firefighters is over. The time has come to deliver presumptive rights legislation, and we will, and the time has come to make sure that our firefighters, their courage and their skill, are matched with a contemporary framework — not one from the 1950s but one that is fit for purpose in a modern Victoria, a growing Victoria and a Victoria that is not well served by the obvious political games of those opposite. If their only concerns are about process, they ought to be embarrassed.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the Leader of the Opposition on a supplementary question, I ask all members to cease shouting across the chamber. Question time began in a much better tone than it has in the past, but there was a very high level of interjections across the chamber during that question. I know this is an emotive issue, but I ask members to refrain from shouting across the chamber.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — The Country Fire Authority Act 1958, section 6G(c), is not process; it is law. VFBV CEO Andrew Ford clearly stated:

Comments by Minister Merlino that VFBV has been consulted about these changes are false and misleading.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr GUY — At least the Minister for Emergency Services is consistent!

Premier, I ask again: did your government consult with the VFBV about splitting the CFA and winding up the MFB before announcing this legislation, or was your Minister for Emergency Services lying?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition has asked a supplementary question. When the chamber is ready, I will call the Premier.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. To be sitting with the member for Gembrook behind you on your front bench and asking me about lying — are you serious? Absolutely the most disgusting comments have been made about firefighters on Black Saturday. This one here backed them in. The Leader of the Opposition backed them in. He had not even read them — he had not even read what the member for Gembrook had said — and yet he supports him every day and twice on Sundays. You ought to sack him.

Mr Guy — Speaker, no-one will forget the plastic cops comment from the Deputy Premier. On a point of order, on relevance, half the time has gone for the Premier to answer. I asked a very serious question, a very straightforward question, about whether the Deputy Premier's comments were incorrect — a simple question. He has not answered. Half his time has gone. I ask you to bring him back to answering that question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier to come back to answering the question.

Mr ANDREWS — The government engage with the VFBV on many different issues, and we intend to continue doing that. We engage with volunteers directly. We do not need to go through the VFBV, who I do not think have said much about a \$100 million boost in funding. Apparently that is not worthy of any comment, much like the way they were silent when you cut their budget. We will keep engaging with them and all volunteers across the state.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the manager of opposition business on a point of order, I warn the member for Ripon to cease shouting across the chamber.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to sessional order 9 in relation to both the supplementary and the substantive questions asked of the Premier. In relation to the substantive question, the

Premier was asked straightforwardly whether or not he complied with the CFA act in relation to the break-up of the CFA that he has announced. He did not at all respond to that, and I ask you to direct him to provide a written answer.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will consider the matter at the conclusion of question time and report back to the house.

Ministers statements: fire services

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — I rise to update the house on historic reforms to our state’s fire services. Since the devastating Black Saturday fires in 2009, where both career and volunteer firefighters served, there have been eight reviews, and they have reached the same conclusion — that our fire services must be modernised. Every day we are at risk of outgrowing our fire services due to the rapid transformation of Victoria’s population and environment.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) will be restored to a volunteer firefighting organisation, and every single one of the 1220 volunteer brigades will continue to serve the same communities. But they will be better supported and better equipped — \$100 million to support volunteer brigades with additional training, equipment and facilities. We will also create Fire Rescue Victoria, bringing our career firefighters into one organisation.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have already warned members to cease shouting across the chamber. I have already warned the member for Ripon. I ask her again to cease shouting across the chamber, as I do the member for South-West Coast and the member for Hawthorn.

Mr MERLINO — They were not shouting when they cut their budget, Speaker.

For career firefighters this will mean more resources, structures, career pathways and training that do not depend upon an arbitrary and outdated distinction between country Victoria and the city. Career and volunteer firefighters will continue to work side by side.

We have been holding forums at Ballarat. Barry, who attended a meeting, said on ABC radio:

I was a sceptic about the CFA changes. I didn’t think it was going to work, but I went to a meeting this morning in Ballarat with the minister and Craig Lapsley and Steve Warrington ... and ...

I don’t think that ... volunteers have a whole lot to worry about.

Fire services

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Emergency management commissioner Craig Lapsley’s submission to the fire services review states that:

Metropolitan centres, such as Dandenong, Boronia, Craigieburn, Sunbury, Caroline Springs, Melton, Hoppers Crossing and Point Cook, operate an integrated fire service model with both paid and volunteer firefighters. This arrangement has worked effectively for decades.

And:

There is no political imperative to amalgamate CFA and MFB ...

So the Country Fire Authority (CFA) did not want to be split up, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) did not want to be abolished and Craig Lapsley has said it is not needed. Minister, what single piece of evidence have you received that contradicts Mr Lapsley and says the best way to keep Victorians safe is to scrap the MFB and tear up the CFA?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask government members and opposition members to come to order.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and I would suggest to him that rather than having shadow cabinet meetings with fellow travellers he should be out in communities talking to career firefighters and talking to volunteer firefighters about what these reforms mean. I can advise the Leader of the Opposition — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Questions and statements interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Ripon

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Ripon has been warned twice and she continues to shout across the chamber. I ask her to leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

I warn members that I will remove further members from the chamber if they persist in shouting across the chamber. The Deputy Premier to continue.

Honourable member for Ripon withdrew from chamber.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and
MINISTERS STATEMENTS**

Fire services

Questions and statements resumed.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — I can advise the Leader of the Opposition — and I note that the shadow minister has been muzzled because of his disgraceful comments — and I can tell you, Speaker, that in talking to career firefighters and volunteer firefighters, they will never forgive or forget the comments from the member for Gembrook.

To the Leader of the Opposition's question, I can tell him that I have been out on the weekend, I have been out on Monday, I have been out on Tuesday with the emergency management commissioner, Craig Lapsley, with the chief officer — —

Mr Richardson interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Mordialloc is warned.

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance. More than half of the minister's time has gone, and I asked one question. That was: what single piece of evidence can the minister produce — just one single piece of evidence — to say that Craig Lapsley's position was wrong?

Ms Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast has already been warned. I rule that the Deputy Premier was coming to answering the question.

Mr MERLINO — Absolutely I was, Speaker. I was making the point on the question from the Leader of the Opposition that I have been out at meetings across the state with the emergency management commissioner, Craig Lapsley, and with Steve Warrington, the chief officer of the Country Fire Authority (CFA). I can tell the Leader of the Opposition, the muzzled, disgraceful member for Gembrook and every single member of the Liberal and National parties that the operational leadership of the CFA and Craig Lapsley as commissioner responsible for coordinating and ensuring operations right across the emergency services

that both support these reforms and are advocating for this change.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — In a meeting with his own local CFA volunteers on 30 May 2016, the Deputy Premier said:

In terms of the fire services review we accept the majority of recommendations out of the review, but we made it absolutely clear when we responded to it that there will be no merger of the fire services in any way.

The Deputy Premier said, 'We made it absolutely clear when we responded to it that there will be no merger of the fire services in any way'. Minister, is it not a fact that the merging of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and career CFA firefighters, as well as 35 integrated stations in order to form Fire Rescue Victoria, is a direct breach of the pledge you gave your own local CFA volunteers?

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — The answer to the question is no. Those opposite are all over the place — hands off the CFA, hands on the CFA. Fair dinkum! Is it the policy of the Liberal and National parties that we are going to merge and have one service? Is that your policy?

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating an answer. If he wants to give a one-word answer, then give it. Maybe in his answer if he wants to apologise to his own local brigades, this is a chance to do it.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The Deputy Premier to continue.

Mr MERLINO — As Craig Lapsley as emergency management commissioner has been making clear at these forums with career and volunteer firefighters, the 1200 volunteer brigades continue — there is no change for them. The volunteers at the 35 integrated stations continue to volunteer at those 35 integrated stations. So I just reiterate: the operational leadership of our fire services support these reforms. Apparently the Leader of the Opposition does not.

Ministers statements: forest firefighters

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change) — I am very, very pleased to update the house on the important investment that this government has made from our recent budget to support our forest fire resources. This is the biggest investment ever since Black Saturday. This budget takes us to all-time high of 340 forest

firefighters, turning around the cuts that were made by the previous government.

There is no doubt whatsoever that this government values our forest firefighters and the work they do every single day to protect Victorians. We value these great Victorians, and that is why our forest firefighters will have the best resources ever because of our budget. We will protect them and defend them as they protect and defend us.

There is no doubt about that, unlike the member for Gembrook, who should be hanging his head in shame for denigrating the brave people of my department and Parks Victoria for putting their lives at risk every single day, some of whom are still suffering trauma from the effects of the Black Saturday event. I do not think they will forget very quickly the words of the member for Gembrook, and we will not either.

This budget builds on the fine work and the job we are doing to protect Victorians with more than \$200 million in additional funds. This is for more planned burns and hundreds of new jobs to reduce bushfire risk right across the state and the refurbishment of key forest resources right across our state.

There is absolutely no doubt that in recent days everyone, except for the few on the other side, would agree that there is no place for cowardly claims — no place at all for cowardly claims. This government will always value the lives of Victorians and those who serve to protect them. We are doing that with a record budget, and we will continue to do that.

Fire services

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) — My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, you and the Premier both said on radio last week that Fire Rescue Victoria's (FRV) industrial situation would be resolved with a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) with the United Firefighters Union (UFU). The Premier described it in these terms:

I'd be confident that we can resolve those matters fairly quickly without the acrimony and the fighting and the hostility.

Minister, is this because after you abolish the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and consequently do not transition its CEO, Jim Higgins, to the FRV, as well as the MFB board and its chair, Andi Diamond, you will have sacked every last vestige of opposition in the fire services in your insatiable urge to placate Peter Marshall at every opportunity?

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — No.

Supplementary question

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) — Joe Buffone, Peter Rau, Jim Higgins, Lucinda Nolan, Jane Garrett, the previous board of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the current board of the MFB were all concerned about increased operational control of the UFU over the MFB and the CFA. Buffone and Rau, as experienced fire officers, had genuine concerns that the proposed EBA would endanger the public. Minister, will you rule out any veto clauses being rolled into the new agreement with the UFU for FRV and then extend it through country Victoria, or is the whole point of creating Fire Rescue Victoria simply a way to give Peter Marshall and the UFU everything they want?

The SPEAKER — Order! Just before calling the Deputy Premier, I do remind the Leader of The Nationals to refer to members of this place by their correct title.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. Joe Buffone was happy if he got more money. Peter Rau resigned — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Eltham is warned. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr MERLINO — The answer again to the Leader of The Nationals is no.

Ministers statements: firefighters presumptive rights legislation

Ms HENNESSY (Minister for Health) — I rise to update the house on how our government will better support both career and volunteer firefighters who have been diagnosed with cancer. Our government accepts the undeniable — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is too much noise in the chamber. I am trying to listen to the minister provide a ministers statement.

Ms HENNESSY — Our government accepts the undeniable link between certain carcinogens that are in firefighting agents and the prevalence of cancer in firefighters. Medical and scientific studies prove this

link. Indeed evidence cited in the *Australian Firefighters' Health Study* conducted by the Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health found an increased risk of prostate cancer, testicular cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma and multiple myeloma, and an association with a range of other really significant cancers. Notwithstanding that, for too long our laws have meant that the onus has been on our firefighters to prove that link.

Our government intends to change that. It is our view, and it is the long-held view of many firefighters, that such an onus is not only unreasonable and unfair but it is unscientific. This will mean that Victoria catches up with many other states. It will also mean that our cancer-suffering firefighters, who have long been denied justice because of an unscientific legal hurdle that has been impossible for many to jump, will now have that issue addressed.

The real question is: who will stand with us in standing up for career and volunteer firefighters? Will those opposite, who in government for four years denied that link — a proven scientific link —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now proceeding from making a ministers statement advising the house about matters to debating the issue. I ask you to bring her back to complying with sessional orders.

Ms HENNESSY — On the point of order, Speaker, I am merely reflecting upon the science and the contested debate about the science. That is entirely relevant to the purpose of my ministers statement.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am prepared to hear the minister's statement.

Ms HENNESSY — Thank you very much, Speaker. As I said, those opposite for four years denied the scientific link between certain cancers that firefighters encounter and the scientific data on this issue, and that is why they did nothing. This government will stand with firefighters. We will not question the science, we will not question firefighters' contribution to things like Black Saturday, and we will continue to work to ensure that our wonderful firefighters are given the best support that they deserve.

Member for Melton

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Given Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings confirm that there is no formal agreement between the member for Melton and this Parliament, and you have refused to use the

Parliament to make him pay back the entire moneys that he has rorted, will you ensure that there is a signed, formal agreement to make serial rorter the member for Melton pay back all the stolen money, including his \$16 000 balloon payment, and if he leaves early, that any outstanding moneys will be deducted from his defined benefits pension?

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the Premier to answer the question, I should advise the house — some members were not in the chamber — that the manager of opposition business this morning raised a series of points of order around imputations against members, which I upheld. I would refer all members to *Rulings from the Chair* in relation to impugning other members of the house, and I would ask them to reflect on the language they use when referring to all members on either side of the house.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He referred to evidence provided at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Attorney-General will come to order.

Mr ANDREWS — I am happy to take the question on notice.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — Well, we know he loses his temper, but sometimes the fish jumps on the hook.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Mr GUY — Serial Labor rorter the member for Melton resigned from Labor's caucus and moved seats in this house to the crossbench when the political heat of his appalling behaviour became too intense for the Premier. Premier, is it a fact that the supposedly independent member for Melton and his office still have access to Labor's constituent data service Electrac?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Government members will come to order.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I think I will take this one. The member for Melton is more of a Pollfile guy, I reckon. Inaccurate conspiracy theories from those

opposite and the member for Gembrook, still in your shadow cabinet.

Ministers statements: Country Fire Authority funding

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) — I rise to inform the house of yet another significant investment in our fire services. Of course we are investing over \$100 million to support Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers in the vital work that they do. That includes \$56.2 million for a CFA Support Fund and \$44 million for infrastructure and equipment. Contrary to the claims of those opposite, the associated costs of this change will not be met through the fire services property levy, and the government will cap the amount that we collect over the next two years. The changes announced last Friday provide a way forward after years of uncertainty and conflict, and we will now have a Country Fire Authority that is wholly volunteer run and run the way it was intended.

The Leader of the Opposition has declared, of course, that his favourite era is the 1950s. It is not surprising that he wants to stick the CFA there too. Sadly, he missed out on his declared favourite historical event, the sinking of the *Titanic*, but he could have consoled himself with the re-enactment or a close approximation of it by attending a press conference with his opposition spokesperson, old ‘Battin down the hatches’. We call him the Tammy Wynette of state politics — he is standing by his man.

We will continue to respect the leadership and the important role that our volunteers perform. It means properly resourcing volunteers, and it means protecting their health and safety. This government will keep on working to protect and defend our volunteers.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier will come to order.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, I bring your attention to a question on notice that I put to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who is now scurrying out of the house yet again, afraid to face his responsibilities as a minister. Anyone who saw this guy at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) hearing would be embarrassed to say he was a minister. He was sweating up a storm, babbling incomprehensibly to answer questions — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte will resume his seat.

Mr Katos interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South Barwon! Points of order must be concise and relevant. I ask the member to make his point of order.

Mr R. Smith — The minister was completely unable to answer questions at the PAEC hearing, and he also seems completely unable to answer questions put to him as questions on notice. After what is now a three-month period — the answer now overdue — this minister, with his departmental and ministerial staff, surely has enough people around him to be able to put together a simple answer to a simple question. This simple question is in relation to a government policy that was talked about ad nauseam before the election about registration discounts for apprentices. You would think that he would know something about it. You would think he would be able to piece together some sort of answer to a question that was put to him, with all the time in the world given to him to answer it.

Speaker, I refer you to *Rulings from the Chair* and a ruling made by the former rorting Speaker, the member for Tarneit, on page 171 — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte will resume his seat. I made it very clear in question time today that the manager of opposition business raised a number of points of order during members statements around imputations against members and that I had said at that time that imputations against any member on either side of the house are out of order. I ask the member not to impugn members.

Mr R. Smith — Just some guidance, Speaker: if someone has rorted, how do I make that clear in the chamber?

The SPEAKER — Order! I am only applying the rulings of this place.

Mr R. Smith — Okay, but there are no rorters over here.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr R. Smith — I refer you to *Rulings from the Chair*, page 171, the June 2015 edition. I refer to the thieving — —

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr R. Smith — Thieving?

The SPEAKER — Order! No.

Mr R. Smith — No, not thieving? Okay. Thieving is not allowed.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member to resume his seat. I responded to points of order raised by the manager of opposition business this morning about imputations against members. I have warned the member for Warrandyte not to impugn members. If the member for Warrandyte wishes to make a point of order about a question on notice that has not been answered, I ask him to come to making that point of order, otherwise he will not be heard.

Mr R. Smith — I refer you to the ruling made, which says, and I quote:

If a minister has not answered a ... question within the time limit, the member who asked the question can make a point of order at the beginning of constituency questions time, drawing it to the Speaker's attention.

Which I have now done.

The Speaker will ... write to the relevant minister.

Which I believe you have done.

If the minister still does not respond within a reasonable amount of time —

and I do not think anyone in this chamber would think an extra three months is a reasonable amount of time —

the member who asked the questions may make a point of order at the beginning of constituency questions drawing this to the Speaker's attention.

Which I am now doing. The ruling from the former Speaker is that:

The minister will be given an opportunity to explain the late response in the house immediately or —

in the case of this particular minister, if he scurries out of the chamber —

if they are not in the chamber at the time, at the next available opportunity. The minister must still provide a written answer to the original question, as required by sessional order.

I ask you to direct the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to enter this chamber and give an explanation as to why his answer to this question is over three months late and give an indication of when he will cease disregarding your directions and adhere to the standing orders that this Parliament voted on, and I ask that you ask him to do his job.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will review the answer and the status of that question and provide a response to the member on his point of order.

Rowville electorate

Mr WELLS (Rowville) — (12 673) The constituency question I wish to raise is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, a large number of people from my electorate, served by both an integrated and a volunteer Country Fire Authority (CFA) station, have contacted me about your latest announcement to split CFA volunteers from working alongside paid firefighters in order to force through your failed enterprise bargaining agreement and appease United Firefighters Union secretary Peter Marshall.

Minister, I ask on behalf of the hardworking people in the CFA in my electorate: how long will it be before you call for yet another review which will boot the CFA volunteers out of all integrated CFA stations and shut down all volunteer CFA stations in the Melbourne metropolitan area?

Pascoe Vale electorate

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) — (12 674) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Education. As the minister is aware, last year Glenroy College was one of 100 schools across the state selected to participate in the Victorian government's Doctors in Secondary Schools program. I understand that schools participating this program are currently being fitted out with modern, fit-for-purpose GP consultation facilities in preparation for the commencement of the program, and I ask: when can Glenroy College expect the fit-out of its facilities to be completed?

The rollout of the Doctors in Secondary Schools program at Glenroy College is a great result for the school community. It is a program designed to provide accessible and affordable medical advice and healthcare services to those students most in need in an environment they know and trust. At Glenroy College students come from every corner of the globe and from every walk of life. Their needs are varied, and this program has the capacity to assist the school in developing a holistic education for those students. I ask the minister: when will consultation facilities be prepared and available?

Euroa electorate

Ms RYAN (Euroa) — (12 675) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety.

How many vehicles a day will be removed from the main street of Kilmore now that the government has scrapped half of the Kilmore-Wallan bypass? Labor announced this week that it is dumping the leg of the project that runs from the Northern Highway to the Hume Freeway. The government claims it has made this decision in response to concerns of the Wandong community about the design of the interchange at the Hume Freeway. I have been asking the minister for almost two years now to meet with Wandong residents to listen to their legitimate concerns about the project, as has the Save Wandong Action Group. Every request was refused by the minister and Ms Symes, a member for Northern Victoria Region in the Legislative Council. After refusing to even talk with the community to understand their concerns and work through possible solutions, including the option of moving the interchange further south to Arkells Lane, the minister put out a press release, ironically titled 'Listening to locals on Wandong interchange', announcing he is dumping half of the bypass — another decision made without any consultation with the community. I call on the minister to explain what impact this will have on the project.

Broadmeadows electorate

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) — (12 676) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport. The information I seek is the timetable for the works on the redevelopment of the Broadmeadows railway station. I want to thank the minister and the government for this investment. It is important for my constituents and for the redevelopment of Broadmeadows. I thank the government for their commitment to a Broadmeadows redevelopment board to look at a whole series of issues and again make Broadmeadows the powerhouse of the north. I want to compare and contrast that with what happened under the previous one-term coalition government. They did the reverse Robin Hood strategy by actually ending this shovel-ready project and redistributing the money to sandbag marginal seats, which is one of the most cynical actions I have seen against one of the poorest communities in the state.

Evelyn electorate

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — (12 677) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. My constituents are questioning his reversal of funding to Manchester Primary School. On 27 June 2016 the minister wrote to Ms Durst, advising that an additional \$180 000 had been allocated to the school for the removal of asbestos materials. This was then confirmed in an email from Mr Kreltszheim, senior projects

officer, in the amount of \$190 400 for the removal of asbestos. Imagine the shock when this week the principal received emails stating this funding was now not available — in fact withdrawn. This funding is essential and my constituents ask that the minister intervene and reverse his reversal.

Narre Warren South electorate

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — (12 678) My question is to the Minister for Education and concerns the Casey Tech School, and I ask: when will the architectural designs for our new tech school be completed? The Casey Tech School will see students from 23 local schools access its specialised programs each year. The new high-tech centre of learning will provide students with hands-on learning with the latest technology. Their focus will be on biomedical technology, health and medical technology and high-tech manufacturing, production and processing technologies. Partnerships with local industry, the City of Casey, Monash University, the South East Local Learning and Employment Network and more have already been established. They have all been hard at work to design the tech school courses, which will ensure our young people gain the skills and knowledge they will need for the jobs of the future. We all cannot wait to see the designs.

Bass electorate

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) — (12 679) My question is for the Minister for Education. Minister, when will you join me in meeting with the principal and the school council of Kooweerup Secondary College to discuss two matters?

In 2014 your government made an election commitment to remove all asbestos in schools by 2020. Some Kooweerup school buildings are falling apart and exposing asbestos tiling. WorkSafe representatives are telling the department that things are not good. The school would like a progress report of your asbestos removal program for all buildings at the school.

The second point of discussion will be the time frame for the funding of stages 2 and 3 of the school upgrade. Stage 1 was funded and successfully completed under the former Liberal coalition government. It is now time for this current government to show the same level of commitment to the educational needs of the Koo Wee Rup community.

Yuroke electorate

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke) — (12 680) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. What is the latest information on the time line for the construction and anticipated opening of Aitken Hill primary school in the Yuroke electorate? It was terrific to see funding for this brand-new school in the state budget after the 2015–16 budget allocated funding for the land. As a member who represents a rapidly growing community, I welcome the forward-thinking approach of the Andrews Labor government and the investments that it has made in education in my community. I know local families would welcome an update from the minister on the time line for this important project.

Polwarth electorate

Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) — (12 681) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Can the minister tell those involved in extractive industries in my electorate what plans he has to streamline the approval process for developing much-needed rock, sand and gravel material for roads and construction? It is reported that nearly 80 applications are before this government for the expansion or creation of new sand, rock and gravel resources that are required to continue to allow Victoria to grow. It is claimed that in two years only two permits have been granted. Businesses tell me that the time line of five to 10 years to get a quarry application up in Victoria is just not viable.

The electorate of Polwarth has six local council areas, all of which are increasingly paying more for urgent and essential road building materials due to the lack of availability of new material brought about by this government's lack of action in this area. KPMG reports that for every \$1 million in heavy construction materials processed, \$2 million is value-added and 17 jobs are created and supported. This government's lack of support for this vital industry is costing jobs and preventing the much-needed upgrade of and safety improvements to the many roads in my electorate.

Sunbury electorate

Mr J. BULL (Sunbury) — (12 682) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. What are the most recent crash statistics for Melbourne-Lancefield Road, and how will the \$20 million upgrade announced by the Andrews Labor government help improve safety on this stretch of road? I was very pleased to join with the state member for Macedon last week to announce a \$20 million upgrade to improve safety along this notorious stretch of road. A

number of constituents have asked me about the most recent crash statistics, and particularly how these upgrades will improve road safety. I ask the minister for this information at his earliest convenience.

Mr Crisp — On a point of order, Speaker, I would like you to check the constituency question of the member for Broadmeadows against the sessional orders. It appeared to me that he spent a lot of time thanking the government and criticising the opposition, but he failed to ask a constituency question as defined by sessional order 7.

Mr McGuire — On the point of order, Speaker, I specifically asked for the information on the critical timetable of the work that is required.

Mr Clark — On the point of order, Speaker, I heard the opening of the member's remarks. He referred to information that he was seeking, but as far as I could hear, he did not actually get around to posing question. I do submit that his constituency question is out of order for that reason.

The SPEAKER — Order! I listened as closely as I could to all the constituency questions today. I thought the member had asked for information at the beginning of his question, but I will review *Hansard* and provide a further ruling to the house. I thank the members raising it. I do remind all members about the fairly narrow way in which constituency questions can be framed.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2016–17

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) — Instead of the national proton beam centre being established in Melbourne where it will deliver the greatest good for the greatest number of cancer patients, the Turnbull government is providing \$68 million funding in Adelaide.

Ms Asher — On a point of order, Speaker, I was in the chamber earlier listening to the member for Broadmeadows. Whilst he did make a reference to the 2016–17 budget estimates, I think, for the rest of his dissertation he has made absolutely no reference to any committee report, which is in violation of the standing orders. I grant that he is speaking on an important issue, but it is not complying with the standing orders. I would ask that you bring him back to speaking on committee reports.

The SPEAKER — Order! I was not in the chamber at the commencement of committee reports, so I am not

able to ascertain if the member for Broadmeadows indicated which committee report he was referring to. I ask the member for Broadmeadows to indicate which committee report he is speaking on.

Mr McGUIRE — I have obviously done that in my introduction. The critical point is that they are trying to talk me down so that I run out of time. It is the usual thing.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Electoral Matters Committee: electronic voting

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I wish to make a few statements in relation to the inquiry into electronic voting from the Electoral Matters Committee, dated May 2017. As this report was recently tabled, I would like to use this opportunity to thank the deputy chair of the committee, the member for Yuroke. I also wish to thank the members of the committee who approached this task assiduously, in particular the member for Pascoe Vale, the member for Nepean, the member for Morwell, and Ms Fiona Patten and Mr Adem Somyurek in the other place.

As chair, I also want to thank the staff of the committee. Mark Roberts is the executive officer, Nathaniel Reader is the research officer and Bernadette Pendergast and Maria Marasco are the administrative officers. And I do want to make special mention of Robert McDonald, the assistant clerk, who did help the committee substantially in our deliberations on electronic voting.

I refer to page xv of the report where the committee has six recommendations, and I want to briefly touch on them. The committee recommended in principle support of electronic voting for a limited category of electors along the lines of the model that operates in New South Wales.

Recommendation 2 called on the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) to work with the Australian Electoral Commission. Clearly there is a substantial budgetary issue, as you, Acting Speaker Spence, well know, if every single state-based electoral commission does its own thing on electronic voting. There are significant advantages to be obtained through a more collaborative approach, something which was acknowledged by various electoral commissions during the inquiry.

The committee also made reference in recommendation 3 to the rigorous security standards that will be needed for something as important as an election. We also recommended an electronic voting

board to be set up to oversee any future electronic voting. I do not think running an election should just be simply left up to the VEC, expert as it is. I think something like a substantial transition to more electronic voting should be overseen by people with not only technical expertise but also by people who understand elections — that is, members of the Victorian registered political parties.

Recommendation 4 requires that the VEC, should there be any further advances in a remote voting system, share this information with registered political parties. The VEC has traditionally not been as enthusiastic about political parties being involved in this process as we on the committee have been.

Recommendations 5 and 6 refer to other advances the VEC could have based on electronic technology available to us such as electronic roll mark-off and electronic ballot paper screening.

When this reference was given to us by the government, we were aware of a lot of people wanting to vote electronically, perhaps via their phones or by some other means. However, the committee found there were a number of mitigating factors against, in some instances, that community desire to vote electronically. One is of course the election day ritual, which has an important role to play in our elections. The second one, which was even more important, was security concerns. As you are well aware, Acting Speaker Spence — you spoke on this matter last week — a lot of people with technical expertise were very concerned about the security of an entire election result, and obviously the census brought that home to members of the public. We were also aware of a world trend in that, other than Estonia, almost every country in the world that has looked at electronic voting is seeking to move away from it.

But we also have a number of other balancing factors, such as the postal voting system declining; more people being away on election day, either interstate or overseas, than has ever occurred before; it being very costly to service those votes; and, even more importantly, those votes being serviced very, very slowly and many people losing out on their right to vote; and the Victorian system, vVote, being extremely difficult for disabled people to use. On balance the committee recommended very conservatively that we think there is a role for some electronic voting, but certainly not for all of the election.

Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee: Country Fire Authority Fiskville training college

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) — I rise to speak on the final report of the inquiry into the Country Fire Authority (CFA) training college at Fiskville. I want to note that of course this was a very, if you like, tripartisan or quadripartisan committee on which we had representatives of the National Party, the Liberal Party, the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party and of course the Labor Party. I was the chair of that committee, and it worked really well.

I have to say there were only a few problems in that committee, and that was when the member for Gembrook was on that committee. As soon as he resigned — because he was too busy to worry about the health and welfare of CFA volunteers — things went much better as there was a real genuineness amongst all those that were part of that inquiry to really get to the bottom of the issues around Fiskville, including the contamination, how much the CFA and the senior management of the CFA knew about the contamination and how much they hid and denied telling those people that were affected by that contamination and the poisonous chemicals that were spread all over that training site.

However, once the member for Gembrook resigned, it completely changed the dynamics of that committee, with everybody working really well, debating the issues, coming up with common-sense approaches and really working hard to make sure that it was an inquiry that was genuine and really got to the bottom of the problems that had been highlighted with both the management of the training facility as well as the cover-ups that had been undertaken there.

Of course there were the most terrible, tragic circumstances where people and their families and children had been exposed to some of the most dangerous and poisonous chemicals that there can be when it comes to people's health, and of course chemicals that had direct links to terminal illnesses such as cancer and so on.

What is happening at the moment is very relevant to that inquiry and to the report. We know that the government is addressing many of the issues that volunteers and other firefighters raised during the evidence of the Fiskville inquiry, whether it was about presumptive rights legislation, modernisation of the fire services or making the governance and accountability of fire services such that people are protected and that those that protect us are also protected by their organisations.

Once the report was handed down there was very little spoken by those people that are the loudest at the moment when it comes to the government's proposals around introducing legislation for presumptive rights legislation to protect firefighters so that they do not have to go through all the drawn-out, long, difficult — near impossible in some cases — ropes that you need to go through to prove that a particular cancer at a particular fire or a particular episode caused that cancer and therefore caused an inability to work. While I cannot go into the details of the presumptive rights legislation that was introduced this morning, it is about making sure that there is a much easier and fairer system for firefighters to have access to workers compensation for illnesses that are directly connected to their work.

Looking at this and also at the modernisation of the fire services, there is a lot of yelling and screaming and jumping up and down by people such as the member for Gembrook and also Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria. They are making a lot of noise and creating a lot of concern and angst amongst volunteers, yet neither the member for Gembrook nor the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria organisation or its representatives have ever made such a noise or such complaints or jumped up and down about the deliberate or wilful exposure of poisonous chemicals to both volunteers and paid firefighters as well as many others in the emergency services that used that training facility. I find it absolutely appalling and disgusting that the only issues that these people seem to care about are their own issues, their own importance and trying to score political points rather than worrying about the concerns and health of volunteers.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: financial and performance outcomes 2015–16

Ms RYAN (Euroa) — I wish to talk today on the report of the 2015–16 financial and performance outcomes by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) which was tabled in Parliament today. I refer specifically to page 18 of the report, which contains a table showing Victorian employment growth and percentage changes in key industries, including education and training.

I note that in the last year there has been a contraction in the education and training sector and the number of people employed there, which is quite interesting when you contrast that to PAEC's report on the 2016–17 budget estimates, which showed that the labour force statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that over the 10 years to 2016 there was significant growth in the number of people employed in

education and training, so it is quite evident from comparing those two tables that in fact this contraction has only just started to occur under this government.

I find that quite concerning because Victoria has traditionally been a leader in education and training, and its reputation, particularly in vocational education, has been the envy of other states, but under this government that reputation is now under threat. It is not just a matter of the role that education and training plays as an employer but also, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that it gives Victorians the opportunities to skill and reskill to obtain meaningful and fulfilling employment and, importantly, to drive the Victorian economy forward.

Over the past year 123 000 students have disappeared from Victoria's training system. That amounts to a 30 per cent reduction in student numbers since Labor came to government. This is a decline that is hitting not just the training system in general but also both TAFE and private training providers. For example, if you look at the statistics from the Melbourne Polytechnic annual report, you will see that since Labor came to government student numbers at Melbourne Polytechnic have actually halved, and six of the TAFEs which have tabled their annual reports in Parliament are now showing an underlying deficit, which is a far cry from the promises that those opposite made before the last election.

On the staffing front — and again this goes back to the report that I was referring to — Bendigo Kangan Institute has seen a 10 per cent reduction in its staff numbers just in the past year, again in direct contrast to the commitment that those opposite gave that there would be no reductions in staffing in TAFE. We have seen that two TAFEs — Federation Training and the Wodonga Institute of TAFE — are actually in breach of the Financial Management Act 1994. I note the Minister for Finance is at the table. Those two TAFEs have not yet even tabled their annual reports for 2016; indeed Federation Training has not tabled a 2015 annual report.

I think the government rightly said that the only measure of a stable training system is not just student numbers — they are correct on that point — but that it also goes to the point of quality. But when you have a look at measures around quality as well, even there the quality of training, despite all of the rhetoric, has declined. In this year's budget — and the specific reference is budget paper 3, page 190 — we can see that there has been no change whatsoever in the 'Proportion of VET completers with an improved employment status after training'. Just half of the students who are now going through our vocational

education and training system are more likely to be employed as a result of studying for that qualification. That is a decline from the 76 per cent of students who were finding a job within six months of their completion under the coalition.

I would just like to conclude with the fact that this government is hiding basic information. In the most recent PAEC hearings the Minister for Training and Skills refused to provide information about workforce data, about the finances of Federation Training and how much money it was receiving from the government. Her excuse, the reason why she refused to provide that information, was because, she said, it was commercially sensitive. The minister at the table, the Minister for Finance, has standing directions under the Financial Management Act 1994 which require Federation Training to provide that information in its annual report, so whose orders do Federation Training and the rest of the TAFEs follow? Do they follow the orders of the Minister for Finance, who has responsibility for their reporting requirements under the Financial Management Act, or do they follow the orders of the Minister for Training and Skills, who is hiding this information?

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: financial and performance outcomes 2015–16

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — There is nothing finer than the crack you hear as you break the spine of a brand-new Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report. I am delighted to be afforded this opportunity to have some new material.

I am delighted to speak on the *Report on the 2015–16 Financial and Performance Outcomes*, which was tabled earlier today. For the benefit of the chamber, this report relates to the way in which public moneys were spent in the course of the 2015–16 financial year. It is different from the estimates report, which is more about prospective expenditure across the forward estimates.

At the outset, as this is the first opportunity I have had to make a contribution on this report, I thank my fellow members: the government members, being the members for Oakleigh and Eltham and Ms Shing, a member for Eastern Victoria Region in the other place; the member for Mornington, who is the deputy chair; Ms Pennicuik, a member for Southern Metropolitan Region in the other place; and the members for Kew and Gippsland South. Ms Patten, a member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the other place, has recently joined our committee.

I would like to point out that this was a really fantastic report to be involved in the preparation of. I was really pleased with the contributions that many members made. I want to particularly single out the deputy chair. He worked assiduously throughout the course of this process. I think that when you work together collectively, productively and constructively you end up with a very good report.

So to the numbers. Looking at the second section, 'Economic Overview', this is a stunning testament to the strength, the vibrancy and the vitality of the state economy. If you look at the 2015–16 financial year, you see that we had gross state product motoring along at 3.3 per cent, which I have to tell you is just absolutely outstanding; it is fantastic. I think part of that growth is due to population growth and the fact that the population over the course of that 2015–16 financial year was growing at 2.1 per cent. We are in a virtual cycle at the moment.

The Treasurer has previously indicated that since the election, 200 000 jobs have been created in Victoria. Because our wages are above the national average, Victoria is seen as a desirable place to come and work, so there is a lot of interstate migration, which is a marked contrast with the early 1990s, when we had an exodus of people from Victoria. More people are coming into the state, and they are purchasing more goods and services. They are buying housing or they are renting. They are buying basic services with which to live, and that is driving a lot of this growth and activity. As a consequence of that, when you have that level of growth, that level of economic activity occurring, you end up having a very strong budget surplus and quite a robust state budget and a robust economy.

I draw attention to paragraph 4.6.1, 'Comparison of Victoria's net debt against other states'. It refers to evidence provided by the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance, Mr David Martine, who talked about our debt ratio as a proportion of gross state product. For 2016 it was 5.9 per cent. As a point of comparison, the federal figure was 18.1 per cent. You do want to take on a level of debt. It is important that you take on a level of debt to build the critical infrastructure we need. In a business sense you do not want to have a lazy balance sheet. You do not want wads of cash just sitting in the bank and assets not being properly utilised. You want to have a proper and appropriate gearing ratio in place so that you can take on the level of debt that is required and appropriate to fund the important infrastructure expenditure that we need in order to keep sustaining the population growth that we are currently experiencing.

If you look at what Victoria is doing compared to the other states, we are trending above New South Wales and we are below Western Australia. But we need to take on a sensible level of debt. It is not so much the dollar sums — I know that the member for Malvern has spoken about \$10 billion additional across the forward estimates — it comes down to your ability to service that debt. It is the way you service that debt which is most important. When you have a strong, vibrant economy, you can — and this is an outstanding report.

Electoral Matters Committee: electronic voting

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — I wish to speak this afternoon on the Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry into electronic voting, which you, Acting Speaker Spence, well know about. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the committee's executive team, Mark Roberts and his team, for their great work and the great support that they gave to our committee. I also thank my fellow parliamentary colleagues who are members of the committee. I think it is a very erudite committee whose members work very well together. The committee is ably led by the member for Brighton and the very good deputy leader of our committee is the member for Yuroke — you, Acting Speaker.

It was a very interesting inquiry that we did. Part of the genesis of it was of course the federal election, which took a long while for a result to be finally arrived at. Everybody was saying, 'We need electronic voting. If we had electronic voting, we would have an instant result and everything would be better'. Within a few weeks we had the census and then we saw electronics and IT at their worst, so everyone seemed to lose their enthusiasm — but we did not; we soldiered on.

I certainly do support the findings of the committee, that in principle we need to go further down this track. There are a lot of caveats, but it is an area that needs to be explored further and one that needs to be explored carefully. I think it holds great promise in helping the very strong electoral system that we have in this country and in this state. One of the great positives of electronic voting is that it would help to enfranchise more people so that they can vote. As we have compulsory voting, which is an extremely important part of our political system here in Australia and in Victoria, we need to enfranchise as many people as easily as possible so that they can exercise that right to vote.

There are a number of security concerns. Cyber security and IT security concerns were raised and obviously they have to be taken into account. That is why we said that we need to proceed with caution. Some very strong arguments were made to us about those issues. One of

the important differentiations that needs to be made is between online voting and more internal electronic counting. They are two quite separate concepts. We did make a point of differentiating between the two because they are often conflated.

Almost 400 000 people in New South Wales voted electronically at their last election, and in Western Australia — I am not sure about their numbers — in their recent election they actually followed with a very, very similar model. Let alone those with disabilities and those who live a fair distance from their polling booth, I think that the large number — and growing number — of people who are either interstate or overseas should not be disenfranchised by the fact that they are travelling for work or for leisure.

Compulsory voting is an important part of our political system here in Australia. It was interesting to learn as we spoke to a whole range of people overseas that overseas jurisdictions are very interested in it. Those who have not got it actually want it, and they think it is very, very important. They would like to actually take it up in their jurisdictions. They do not see it happening, but they say it really is a very pure form of enfranchisement — a very, very important part — and I think it gives greater credibility to whatever government of the day is elected.

As I said, basically we need to move forward with caution, but we should move forward along the electronic voting line. I think that we need to work together with all state jurisdictions so that we can share our expertise and come up with a model that is going to work. We need to proceed very, very carefully, but it would be of great strength to our democracy.

STATE TAXATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL 2017

Second reading

Debate resumed from 9 May; motion of Mr PALLAS (Treasurer).

Mr M. O'BRIEN (Malvern) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017, a bill that represents another litany of broken promises by this Labor government. We all remember the Premier when he was the opposition leader on the day before the election, standing there on the steps of Parliament House, being interviewed live by Peter Mitchell of Channel 7. Peter Mitchell asked the then opposition leader whether he could guarantee that if he were elected Premier, he would not introduce any new taxes or increase any taxes, and the then opposition

leader looked down the barrel of the camera to Victorians on the eve of the election and said:

I make that promise, Peter, to every single Victorian.

That was the sentence, that was the line — no asterisks, no qualifications, no 'Oh, maybe this or maybe that'. It was a bold, clear statement, and it has turned out to be nothing but a grubby lie. This bill is yet again more proof of that lie by this Labor government.

This is a Labor government that has put up or increased taxes at least 11 times since the election — 11 breaches of faith with the people of Victoria, 11 broken promises just on tax alone. When we look at the total tax take under this government, the state tax burden has risen by \$4 billion a year between the pre-election budget update in 2014–15 and the state budget of 2017–18 — a \$4 billion a year tax impost on Victorians, on Victorian households and on Victorian businesses.

This is disgraceful. This is a government that has no respect for Victorians, no respect for their lives, no respect for their ability to pay their bills and no respect for their own property. Nowhere does this government's disrespect for Victorians and their rights to their own property become more apparent than in one of the more pernicious new taxes in this bill, the so-called vacant residential land tax. This is a socialist wet dream, this new tax. Here is the Premier saying, 'If you own property and you do not use it in a way I deem fit, you are going to pay an extra tax'.

I will come to all this litany of broken taxes in a moment, but it is interesting that you actually get a state tax bill that is so roundly condemned by stakeholders in our community. What does the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC) say about it? Well, the VACC says, and I quote:

The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC), does not support the proposed State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017 and specifically where it relates to a proposed increase in stamp duty on the sale of new or near new vehicles.

This is in a letter to me dated 18 May 2017. It also says:

This change in stamp duty reflects an unprecedented rise of approximately 33 per cent on the current rate of stamp duty for new vehicles.

The letter goes on:

The increase does not 'realign' Victoria with other states. It makes vehicles sold in Victoria less competitive than those sold in NSW.

The letter talks about:

... negative local consequences in terms of the commitment that they —

meaning car dealers —

make towards community activities, e.g. sponsorships, employment ...

...

A lack of industry consultation has left new car dealers in an invidious position on cars ordered but scheduled for delivery after 30 June 2017.

...

The actions of government in this regard has, in one fell blow, marginalised Victorian new-car dealers and has made them less competitive than their interstate counterparts.

Damning condemnation by the VACC.

A letter from the executive director in Victoria of the Housing Industry Association (HIA), Fiona Nield, says:

HIA does not support the introduction of a vacant property tax in the specified areas of inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne. This will be seen as another deterrent to investors who may be considered to purchase properties for a range of reasons and then leave them vacant.

...

This is likely to create further pressure on investors and barriers to investment in housing. It is more likely to reduce supply, rather than increase it.

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has talked about the government's proposed amendments to payroll tax in regional Victoria. It says:

It will be important that the administrative approach to determining whether a business is a 'regional employer' and whether their proportion of 'regional employees' meets the required 85 per cent threshold is as clear and simple as possible and does not impose additional red tape.

That is fascinating.

This is one of the most convoluted bills I think I have ever seen and from a government that talks about — I emphasise 'talks about' — streamlining procedures for business and cutting red tape. Let us just look at a single one of the clauses in this bill relating to regional businesses and how they are supposed to account for their payroll to see if they are eligible for this payroll reduction. This is in clause 74 of the bill. I do not know how our poor friends in Hansard are going to deal with this so I will read it out as it appears in the bill; it may be that Hansard is able to incorporate the relevant subclause into my remarks. But this is a formula which businesses are supposed to use in determining payroll matters under this alleged regional payroll tax cut eligibility. It is:

$$\left[\left[\text{JTW} - D \right] \times \frac{P_{re}}{\text{JTW}} \right] \times R_{re} + \left[\left[\text{JTW} - D \right] \times \frac{P_e}{\text{JTW}} \right] \times R_e$$

If this is Labor's idea of simplifying business tax, simplifying business regulation and streamlining red tape, they need their heads read. This is absolute nonsense. It is as clear as mud, as my shadow parliamentary secretary, the member for Forest Hill, has pointed out. This is ridiculous. This is a government that cannot even give a tax cut without picking someone else's pocket on the way through. The government says, 'Oh, look, we're going to cut stamp duty for first home buyers. Isn't that a laudable thing to do?'. But then the government says, 'Oh, but we're not just going to give a tax cut; we have to take away somebody else's benefit to pay for it, so we are going to abolish off-the-plan stamp duty concessions for everybody but owner-occupiers'.

When the former coalition government cut stamp duty for first home buyers by 50 per cent, which it did, it just cut the tax. When you are a Liberal or a National and you want to give someone a tax cut, you cut their tax. It is not that hard. You do not say, 'Well, we'll cut your tax, but then we'll pick someone else's pocket to pay for it'. That is the Labor way. It is the Artful Dodger method of tax reform — or the Don Nardella approach to tax reform — where you steal money from somebody, you give a bit of it back and you expect to get praise for it. That is the Labor approach to tax.

Briefly I will also mention councils, because I do not think I have seen anything in my 10 years in this place which has so united councils in opposition as this government's attempt to take away the valuation functions that have been exercised by councils, centralise that in the valuer-general and then move to annual property valuations. There are two reasons the government is doing this, and neither of them covers the government in glory. The first one is it is just a grubby little land tax grab.

At the moment the way the system works is that there are biennial valuations: every two years your property is revalued. If you pay land tax, in a rising market — I think we have seen rising markets for 18 of the last 20 years according to one valuer that I spoke to, so 90 per cent of the time property values go up — every two years the value of your property will go up and you will pay higher land tax in that year, but then you get another year of certainty where you will effectively pay the same amount of land tax as you paid the year before. So it does provide a level of certainty. You can predict for two years what your land tax liability is going to be and you can plan accordingly.

Now Labor wants to move to a situation where you have land tax increased effectively every single year by having annual valuations, so you do not get a breather anymore. Oh, no, Labor does not want anyone who owns property and pays land tax to get a breather. No, you can pay a higher land tax every single year. That is what this is all about — it is a grubby little grab for land tax from a grubby government that has been taxing Victorians to the hilt.

But there are bigger problems than just a grab for land tax. The government is also seeking to effectively appropriate councils' work, their intellectual property, when it comes to undertaking valuations by centralising all of that in the valuer-general. At the moment with the system of council valuations there is a sense of check and balance. While councils conduct valuations, councils do not necessarily benefit from a higher valuation coming in in their area because once councils rates are set, effectively the property valuation is not about increasing the size of the revenue that comes in, it is simply about dividing up who pays for it. It is a division of the pie. Whereas when it comes to the state government, when property values are found to have increased, the state government is a direct beneficiary of that increase. To centralise all the powers in the valuer-general means that a state government authority is now the sole body responsible for valuations when it is the state government that benefits and is seen to benefit from increased valuations.

Mr Angus interjected.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — A conflict of interest. This matter has been raised with me by a number of local councils. As I said, I do not think I have seen any initiative by any government be as roundly and universally opposed and condemned by local government as this. I have received correspondence from the City of Stonnington, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), the Shire of Campaspe, the Wellington Shire Council, the Gippsland Local Government Network, the Baw Baw Shire Council, the Bass Coast Shire Council, the City of Whitehorse, the Hobsons Bay City Council, the Colac Otway Shire Council, the Pyrenees Shire Council, the City of Moonee Valley, the Loddon Shire Council, the City of Whittlesea, the East Gippsland Shire Council, the Mildura Rural City Council, the Gannawarra Shire Council and the City of Darebin, and there are others I can add to that list. All of them, every one of those councils, say the government has got it wrong. They condemn the fact that there was no consultation by this government before it sneakily announced this change on budget day.

This government has actually signed up to commitments about consulting with local government on matters that affect them. This change will have an enormous effect on local government and yet there was no consultation whatsoever — a complete breach of the obligations that this government willingly signed up to. It just shows that this government cares nothing for consultation when it thinks there is a dollar at the end of it. It is the same approach this government has taken to the Country Fire Authority — no consultation because it does not suit its political interests.

There are other concerns for local government here. One is for those local governments that have in-house valuers; they are going to lose their jobs. Labor is quite happy to see valued, professional planning officers get the sack, get the bullet, because it wants to centralise all functions in the valuer-general. There are also issues with supplementary valuations. Where, for example, there is a large project developed in a local government area and it turns what might have been industrial land into something that is residential land, there is a need for a supplementary valuation. That is an important source of revenue for local government, and yet with local governments cut out of the valuation process, they will have to get in the queue and hope that at some point the valuer-general may be able to get around to providing a supplementary valuation. Thus local government is absolutely cut out of the ability to control its own destiny in that regard.

What about local governments that have contracts with private valuers to conduct their valuations? There is nothing in this bill to help local governments deal with that. Are they simply expected to break contracts? We know that Labor has got no respect for contracts. We know that Labor governments think you can just rip up contracts willy-nilly and it does not matter. We know that is the way they approach these things. We know they are happy to cost Victorians \$1.3 billion by ripping up contracts. But what about local governments? I never thought I would say this, but there are probably a few people, even some of the Labor local governments, that have a lot more integrity than members of the current state Labor government, and maybe they do not want to rip up contracts. But there is nothing in this legislation to deal with that matter whatsoever.

Then of course we come to the accuracy of valuations. Rural councils have written to the opposition and written to the government and have made clear through the MAV that they actually support moving to four-yearly valuations, because in some small rural areas you simply do not see the capital appreciation that you see elsewhere and also you do not see the volume of transactions. So they have to go through what they

see as being a very costly exercise to revalue every two years when they say it would actually be better for them and better for their constituents, better for their ratepayers, to move to four-yearly valuations.

But now we see Labor is requiring every local council in Victoria to move to annual valuations. Not only is this going to cost local government a lot more — the Municipal Association of Victoria has estimated the additional cost to be between \$20 million and \$25 million across councils — but that is \$20 million to \$25 million that could have been put into local facilities, fixing local roads, for example, and doing things that Labor has not done. But, no, Labor would rather take that valuation authority away from local government, centralise it in the valuer-general and just send the bill to the councils. This government is expert at sending the bill to someone else to pay. Whether it is sending the bill for regional rail to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull or sending the bill for valuations to local councils, this is a government that never pays its own bills; it just sends them on to somebody else.

But what happens when you actually go from biennial valuations to single-year valuations? The first point I make, as somebody who managed to get through his stats subjects in uni — it was not the favourite part of my commerce degree, I must admit, but I managed to get through it — is that the less data you have, the less confidence you can have in your forecasts. So to move from two-yearly, biennial, valuations where you have two years worth of property transactions and two years worth of data, to one-year valuations means by definition that you have got only half the level of data points and you will not get the same level of confidence in your valuations.

Mr Pearson interjected.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — The member for Essendon might be good at doing numbers in the Labor Party, but he is clearly no good at doing stats. He is seriously suggesting that moving to single-year valuations will give you greater confidence in your forecasts than having two years worth of data on the same valuation — absolute nonsense. It is a shame that the Minister for Finance is not still at the table, because I would suggest that he go up and have a chat to the member for Essendon and explain a little bit to him about how statistics work.

So we are going to get something which is less accurate. Victorians who pay land tax are going to have to pay more land tax every single year based on less accurate forecasts, and that is exactly what does suit

this Labor government, because all they want people to do is to pay and pay and pay again.

Now is probably as good a time as any for me to move my reasoned amendment and ask for it to be circulated. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place the words:

'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the Andrews Labor government has:

- (1) fully consulted with local councils regarding the increased costs, loss of jobs and conflict of interest consequential upon centralising property valuation authority with the valuer-general;
- (2) fully consulted with road safety experts and Victorian motor vehicle retailers regarding the impact of the proposed increase in duty on new and near-new motor vehicles on road safety, local car retailers and purchasers;
- (3) fully consulted with all Victorians affected by proposed new and increased taxes on:
 - (a) transfers of certain property between spouses;
 - (b) owners of certain residential properties in parts of Melbourne who do not use such property in accordance with the government's approval;
 - (c) people who wish to purchase new properties off the plan who will be required to pay additional duty'.

To put this in a nutshell, the Liberal and National parties do not support increasing taxes on Victorians, especially when they are in clear breach of an absolute promise given by the Premier before the election. We are not going to be supporting broken promises from the Labor government. We are not going to support them. We think this move to take power away from councils to value properties is a retrograde move. It is a bad decision that will cost jobs, will cost Victorians and will lead to less accuracy and less confidence in the system.

Then we look at the new taxes in this bill. Let us just run through a few of them. The bill abolishes off-the-plan duty concessions for non-owner-occupiers. That is a cost to Victorians of \$841.2 million over the forward estimates. This is something which really goes against your basic laws of supply and demand. Labor says it wants to tackle housing affordability. One way in which you tackle housing affordability is by increasing supply. Increasing supply is the way you can tackle price pressures on housing. But what this bill does is says to non-owner-occupiers, 'There is no point in buying off the plan because you do not get the same tax concession that an owner-occupier gets'.

The only reason why anybody buys off the plan and takes the risk of the drawings and the plans not matching up with the finished product and the risk of having some of their capital tied up through paying deposits and staged payments is that they get the benefit of the off-the-plan concession. Absent that benefit, no sensible investor is going to sign up to an off-the-plan project. You will wait until you see the finished product, because you are paying stamp duty based on the finished product anyway, so you may as well see it for yourself, and you get to keep your capital in the meantime.

What the government is doing here is saying, 'We do not want investors to be ground-floor purchasers of off-the-plan apartments'. Labor might think, 'Well, that is terrific, that would just leave a lot more space for owner-occupiers to get into the market', but that is not the way it works, because you need a large amount of your apartments pre-sold before the banks will ever give you finance for them. From speaking to industry I know you need pre-sale levels of 60, 70, 80 or more per cent on a project before the banks will lend. So if you are effectively saying to investors, 'We do not want you to buy off-the-plan apartments', and you are only relying on owner-occupiers, many projects simply will not get off the ground. There simply will not be the level of precommitment by owner-occupiers necessary to get the finance to get these things built. This will simply lead to a reduction in supply.

Even Labor members might understand that when you reduce supply in a market such as this, all it leads to is an increase in price. The REIV, the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, has said:

The REIV does not support the removal of the off-the-plan concessions for investors. This change will reduce the attractiveness of property investment in Victoria, further limiting rental supply at a time when vacancy rates are already tightening.

So you have the REIV making clear that this will not just hurt purchasers, because if there are fewer projects to purchase, that will hurt first home buyers and it will hurt renters as well. It hurts investors, it hurts renters and it hurts first home buyers.

An honourable member — It hurts everybody.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — It hurts everyone. The only person who benefits is the Treasurer, who manages to rip another \$841.2 million out of the pockets of Victorians.

There is this pernicious new vacant residential land tax. This is expressed to be a new tax to apply to certain residential properties located in what the government

terms inner and middle Melbourne, although I note it includes municipalities such as Banyule and Manningham, which have got elements which I would say are certainly getting out there beyond middle Melbourne. One per cent of a property's capital improved value is to be taxed every single year.

This is a tax to apply to residential properties where the Premier and the Treasurer do not like the way you are using them. If they think that you have got a property and you do not use it as much as they think you should, they are going to hit you with a new tax. Let us say you are a farmer, you have a farm in country Victoria and you have a little one-bedroom unit in Melbourne. You might use that unit sometimes when you come to town. You might come in for medical appointments, you might come in to go to the footy or you might come in to see your grandkids in a play.

Under Labor, if you do not use that property for a period of at least four weeks a year if it is termed a holiday house, for at least 140 days a year if it is regarded as being used for the purpose of attending a place of business or employment, or otherwise for six months a year, then you get to pay an additional 1 per cent of the capital improved value. So on a \$600 000 unit or apartment that is an extra \$6000 each and every year, simply because the Premier and the Treasurer do not like how you are using your property. That is why I say that this is a socialist measure, because this measure has got no respect for the private property of Victorians.

The government says that holiday homes are exempt, but what is the definition of a holiday home? There is not one in the bill; there is not one at all. How are people expected to demonstrate to the State Revenue Office (SRO) that they have met the six-month, the four-week or the 140-day requirements, depending on which level of exemption is claimed? Do people have to keep a diary? In the briefing I received — and I thank SRO and Treasury officers for providing that briefing to me — it was indicated that, 'No, they do not have to keep a diary'. But how else are people expected to actually prove to the SRO that they have met the qualifications for an exemption? This is big brother stuff. The Premier now wants you to keep a diary and provide it to the taxman to show where you slept. The Premier wants to know where you sleep every night. He wants to know, 'Where did you sleep? Did you sleep in your principal place of residence? Did you sleep in an apartment in the city that you own? If so, what was the purpose of it? Was it for a holiday? Were you there for your business?'

This is the sort of outrageous overreach that this government is engaged in. This is an absolutely

pernicious measure. Can I also say that this is the thin end of the wedge. If this government is allowed to get away with telling Victorians, 'We are going to slug you with extra tax because we do not like how you use your own property', then the sky will be the limit.

We have seen a nearly \$400 million increase in stamp duty on new cars. That is not only a huge whack to our motor traders, a huge whack to Victorian consumers and vehicle purchasers, but this is a blow to road safety. We asked the government in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and we asked the government here in this chamber, 'What advice did you receive from the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) about the road safety implications of making new cars more expensive?', because the TAC has made it clear and the government's own Towards Zero road safety strategy makes it clear that there is a correlation between the age of cars on the road and the incidence of serious injuries and accidents. In neither case can the government say that there was any consultation with the TAC. This is a government that is literally putting new tax dollars ahead of road safety. It is appalling and we oppose it.

In relation to abolishing duty concessions for spouses who transfer property between each other, let us say that two people get married. One partner, and as an example let us say the husband, might have some property. There is a new wife in the relationship, and the husband might want to transfer some property into joint names so that the new wife has got some security, some sense that she has got some joint ownership of the family property. Under this proposal that cannot happen. With any property other than the principal place of residence it cannot happen without attracting huge stamp duty. This is actually an attack by the government on gender equality. For a government that likes to talk about gender equality, when it comes to the crunch they are quite happy to tax families and make it harder.

I could refer to a number of the other problems in this bill. There are enormous increases throughout this bill. We do not support the bill as it currently stands. We think the government should consult properly with all those Victorians who will be affected, including the councils that will lose jobs, lose revenue and lose independence by the centralisation of the valuer-general functions. The government should consult with the road safety experts, the car dealers and the consumers who will be hit with the new car tax. They should consult with the families who will be hit with a new spousal property transfer tax, the farmers who will be hit with the new so-called vacant land residential tax, and the builders who will be out of jobs. This is another Labor tax bill and more broken promises.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — I am delighted to make a contribution on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017. I am reminded of a quote from Alexander Hamilton, who said:

Limiting the powers of government to certain resources is rendering the funds precarious; and obliging the government to ask, instead of empowering it to command, is to destroy all confidence and credit. If the power of taxing is restricted, the consequence is that on the breaking out of a war you must divert the funds appropriated to the payment of debts, to answer immediate exigencies. Thus, you violate your engagements at the very time you increase the burthen of them. Besides, sound policy condemns the practice of accumulating debts. A government, to act with energy, should have the possession of all its revenues to answer present purposes.

I say that because you need to make sure that if you want to do the things that you wish to do as an administration, and it does not matter whether it is Labor occupying the Treasury benches or the coalition, you must be able to pay for your promises and you must be able to fund your commitments, and a bill like this is really important.

I did listen to the member for Malvern's contribution. I think he described the vacant property tax as a socialist wet dream. Listening to the last half hour that can only be described as an exercise in self-abuse by the member for Malvern. Honestly, it was just woeful.

The reality is that we are in a set of circumstances where offshore investors are seeking to invest funds in property here because it is a safe haven, and it is only right that those assets are taxed appropriately. The reality is that those assets are going to require to use services from time to time, and it is appropriate that they should be levied accordingly. The member for Malvern talked about annual valuations. My experience in business was that I liked to have certainty of my cost base. I liked to have a smooth path in terms of the costs my business would incur. I did not like having costs that would ratchet up and I could not plan for them. I think that when you are in a situation when you can plan your business accordingly and you have got that certainty, it is a very good thing.

I am conscious of the time, and I am sure that people would like to have lunch. This is a very important piece of legislation because it enables us to pay for our commitments and to fulfil and discharge our obligations.

Mr Katos interjected.

Mr PEARSON — I am listening to the member for South Barwon complaining. He is not talking about payroll tax reductions in regional Victoria,

which will be the lowest in the state. It is really important when we are growing at such a rapid rate of knots that we are encouraging decentralisation, and economic growth should be dispersed into regional Victoria. It is a very good piece of legislation, and I commend the bill to the house.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Firefighters

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I have accepted a statement from the member for Monbulk proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house:

- (1) acknowledges the critical contribution of all firefighters — career and volunteer — as our population and environment change; and
- (2) condemns the opposition leader and the shadow emergency services minister for misleading Victorians in an attempt to divide firefighters who saved lives during Australia's worst ever bushfire.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) — I rise to speak on the matter of public importance submitted in my name. The Andrews Labor government acknowledges the critical contribution of all our firefighters — career and volunteer — to community safety as our population and environment changes. We condemn the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister for Emergency Services for misleading Victorians in an attempt to divide firefighters who saved lives during Australia's worst ever natural disaster. In the Legislative Assembly last week the member for Gembrook said:

When we go back to February 2009, the minister should be able to tell us how many career firefighters were on the firefighting ground on 7 February for the first 5½ hours on Black Saturday. I can tell the house that it was zero.

They are the words of the member for Gembrook, and he should be ashamed of himself. Not only are his comments completely and utterly untrue, they are incredibly hurtful. Firefighters will not forget or forgive the disgraceful comments of the member for Gembrook. An apology is not enough. He has proven himself to be unfit to be the shadow Minister for Emergency Services. Why is he cowardly refusing to give a personal explanation to this house? He is a coward, Deputy Speaker.

Our brave firefighters put their lives on the line during the Black Saturday fires in 2009, and they should not be used as political footballs by a desperate opposition. These comments are an insult to all firefighters who served on Black Saturday, a catastrophic day that claimed 173 lives. The Liberals have been vilifying our career firefighters for years, continually pitting firefighter against firefighter, but this is an all-time low. For the record — and the member for Gembrook should be listening very clearly — career firefighters from the Country Fire Authority (CFA), from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), from Parks Victoria and from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning were deployed to fight multiple Black Saturday bushfires.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast is out of her seat. She will stop interjecting.

Mr MERLINO — They worked side-by-side with volunteer firefighters across the state. On Friday I was at the Craigieburn integrated station announcing our fire service reforms along with a group of dedicated career and volunteer firefighters who love working closely together, and they will continue to do so. This morning I have already told one story of a volunteer from the CFA strike crew at Craigieburn. I want to tell another one now. The strike team on Black Saturday was made up of staff and volunteers from Craigieburn and Sunbury and volunteers from Greenvale.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MERLINO — I am talking about lives lost on Black Saturday. How about you deliver a bit of respect to firefighters?

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Premier should address his remarks through the Chair. I ask members to cease interjecting. I cannot hear the Deputy Premier's contribution.

Ms Britnell interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast will not cast reflections on the Chair.

Mr MERLINO — Their forward control vehicle was lost in the early afternoon on Saturday at Humevale near Whittlesea. They had to abandon the vehicle and run for their lives, returning to find the vehicle burnt

out. There is now a piece of molten metal from that burnt-out vehicle mounted on a wall at their station as a reminder of the dangers that crew — career and volunteer — faced and lived through together on that day. On Friday morning I was at their station, and the importance of that reminder to the members of that station was made very clear.

This was one of the most significant events in these people's lives as individuals and as a team, and as we have heard, it will never leave them. Those opposite have no idea of the hurt they have caused. They have no idea whatsoever. After the member for Gembrook offered an inadequate apology on social media, he then backtracked, claiming on the 3AW *Drive* program on Monday night that he was only referring to the Bunyip Ridge fire. That is what he said on 3AW.

This is also completely false. As the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission made clear, career firefighters from a number of agencies were involved in fighting the Bunyip Ridge fire from when it started burning on 2 February 2009 and continued to be involved throughout Black Saturday on 7 February.

This pattern of behaviour makes it clear that the member for Gembrook is unfit to stay in his position, and the Leader of the Opposition needs to show some leadership and sack him. His shadow minister's comments, as I said, were incredibly hurtful and an insult to all firefighters who served on Black Saturday. When someone lies repeatedly about Black Saturday, when they choose to make comments that are meant to query any firefighter's contribution and dedication on that day and in the recovery afterward, it is an insult to all firefighters. The member for Gembrook's assertions and the subsequent cover-up were not just insulting because they were factually incorrect, they were insulting because the purpose of those words — of suggesting that career firefighters might not have turned up to the worst bushfire in our nation's history — was to deliberately and cynically divide people.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Eltham. Members of the opposition.

Mr MERLINO — The suggestion from the member for Gembrook is quite clear — that they were deficient in their duties, that they were negligent in their duties. That is the message from the member for Gembrook, and I challenge him: rather than talking to his friends in shadow cabinet —

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte.

Mr MERLINO — he should go out and talk to career and volunteer firefighters.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I ask members to cease interjecting across the chamber. I cannot hear the Deputy Premier's contribution.

Mr MERLINO — The point he was trying to make is that one group is better than the other, and that is not right. He was trying to drive suspicion and resentment between people who work together to save lives. This is a group of people who have been subject — —

Mr Pakula — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Warrandyte and the member for Hawthorn are clearly disregarding the instruction you just gave to the house about ceasing interjections across the chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I ask again members of the opposition to cease interjecting. I also ask all members to show some respect in this house and cease interjecting altogether and let the Deputy Premier finish his contribution.

Mr R. Smith — On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, clearly the member for Monbulk just asked me to speak up, so I do not know whether he should — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte will resume his seat. The member for Warrandyte will show some respect to the Chair.

Mr MERLINO — I have spoken to firefighters who, when they pick up their kids from school, when they go to the newsagent's or the butcher's in their town, do not wear their uniform, because they have been subject to abuse and because of the anger and the tension in their community. These are families who felt a new divide where there had not been one before. This is what happens when people sow division. The member for Gembrook used the privileges of public office to cause harm to ordinary Victorians who have done nothing more than wear the uniform and put their lives at risk to protect other people's lives and other people's property, and he was defended by the Leader of the Opposition, who admitted that he had not even read what the member said in this place. That is why it is so disgraceful.

Another scare campaign that those opposite are running is that somehow if we restore the CFA to a volunteer organisation, provide them with further legislative protection and an extra \$100 million in support, training, equipment and facilities, then volunteers will not want to serve our communities anymore. Unlike those opposite, we know what our volunteer and career firefighters care about, and that is protecting their communities. Those opposite enjoy nothing more than accusing firefighters of not being willing to fight fires.

Standing with the embattled shadow Minister for Emergency Services, just days after he made disgraceful slurs against Black Saturday firefighters, the opposition leader claimed that volunteer firefighter numbers in New South Wales are less than in Victoria. Again, not true. He is a habitual liar. The annual report of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service confirms that the organisation had 73 162 volunteers in 2015–16 —

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte and the member for Eltham will cease interjecting across the chamber.

Mr MERLINO — while the Victorian CFA annual report shows it had 57 111 volunteers in the same year.

The opposition leader's claim about per capita levels of volunteers is also completely wrong. The latest Productivity Commission *Report on Government Services* shows that in 2015–16 New South Wales had 1163 volunteer firefighters per 100 000 people, while Victoria had 954 volunteer firefighters per 100 000 people — again completely wrong information from those habitual liars on the other side.

We will make sure that CFA firefighters and volunteers have the equipment and support they need, with a dedicated \$56 million CFA Support Fund to assist them in recruitment, training, equipment and facilities, and a \$44 million capital program.

Mr Pesutto interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Hawthorn!

Mr MERLINO — We have got 1220 volunteer brigades. These reforms will deliver — guess what — 1220 volunteer brigades. The volunteers at our integrated stations will remain CFA volunteers at our integrated stations.

Let me finish by talking about what volunteers think about our reforms. The captain of the Wattle Glen fire brigade has said:

Reform of fire services in Victoria is needed ...

And:

... I remain confident that any change that should take place will be in the best interest of the community. I also believe that Wattle Glen community will have the benefit of its own fire brigade and team of committed volunteers to deliver fire and emergency response services for many, many years to come.

The Ararat fire brigade captain said:

We would like to assure the Ararat community that nothing will change with our commitment to our community. The Ararat fire brigade was formed ... in 1859 and that tradition continues. Every member that responds to a call with the Ararat fire brigade is a volunteer.

A representative of the Bayles fire brigade said:

Today we want to reinforce to our community that we are still here and will always respond to assist whenever we are called, no matter how the next period plays out.

The first lieutenant of the Allans Flat fire brigade said:

... we as a brigade will continue to respond to emergencies not only within our brigade area but also supporting our neighbouring brigades and their communities.

Those 1220 brigades will continue to deliver support for our community across Victoria. Integrated brigades will become co-located brigades — CFA volunteers working with their career colleagues. They will continue — unlike the member for Gembrook, who disgracefully lied about Black Saturday, who should get up here and resign. He has got no credibility among our fire services. He is done.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) — We have heard all of this from the very man who has been out in his own electorate lying to volunteers continuously, a man that swore he was going to introduce presumptive rights legislation in 100 days.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Speaker made a ruling this morning that the word 'liar' will not be used in this house to cast aspersions on other members. I ask members not to use that word in the house.

Mr BATTIN — He is a man who has misled his own community, who has put false information to his own community, who has continuously gone to his community, the volunteers that have protected him, and cannot be trusted. He cannot be trusted when he is

talking about those volunteers. We can look back at one of the conversations he had in here when he said straight out that they would not merge the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB). The member for Monbulk met with his volunteers, and he said the government would not merge the CFA and the MFB. What do we see? We see this government now going against that promise. I can give him a transcript if he likes of the whole meeting he had there. The member for Monbulk might be interested in reading the entire transcript — that whole meeting was recorded.

I can even go back to question time. The minister was asked about presumptive rights legislation and how he had said to his local volunteers that it was going to be delivered in 100 days. He replied, 'I never said that'. Not once did he come out and apologise to those volunteers who had to sign statutory declarations to prove this man wrong. I know who I trust; I trust the volunteers in the minister's electorate, not him as the member for Monbulk.

I would never trust the member for Monbulk, the man who came into this place and spoke about protective services officers (PSOs), who do a wonderful job at many of the stations not just in my electorate but across our whole state, including regional Victoria. They continuously serve us there. What did he call them? He called them 'plastic police' — the men and women that come in here and protect him as the minister. They are the ones that give us the right to work in this place, and he calls them 'plastic police'. What an absolute disgrace!

What do we see today? This is nothing short of a diversion from what this Premier and this minister are doing to the CFA. They are going out of their way to destroy the heart and soul of the CFA. They are going out of their way to tear away what volunteers have done and the protection they provide us.

The minister started reading from Facebook. It is funny: I do not think he wanted to read this one. Talking about presumptive rights legislation, they have been running a campaign on Facebook for a long time:

Today I have been informed that the Andrews government has linked the reforms of the Victorian fire services to the presumptive legislation. This has politicised cancer, the deaths and the injuries that the firefighters have contracted during their service to the state of Victoria. This is conditional politics. It is disgusting to use cancer as a lever to achieve one's aim ...

That is from Brendan Tug Wilson, who has run a very strong campaign on Facebook and throughout the

media to try to get presumptive rights legislation. What do we see?

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for South Barwon, you are out of your seat.

Mr BATTIN — We see him wanting to attach the destruction of the CFA to presumptive rights legislation. If they want to talk about cowards, they should separate the legislation. We will put presumptive rights legislation through straightaway. We will not wait. The minister promised it would happen in 100 days. We can help him get it over the line right now. All we are asking is that he separate it and give respect back to the volunteers.

At no time has that side over there consulted with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV). Not once has the minister actually gone out and spoken to VFBV. VFBV are the board, they are the panel, they are the ones that represent and are the voice of volunteers across the state.

And the volunteer charter is not hard to go back to. I could give you a copy of it if you like. If you have not read the volunteer charter, I am more than happy to offer you a copy. It:

Ensures the state of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect volunteers;

Provides the framework for the three-way relationship between the parties, requiring the success of the relationship and the outcomes from the charter to be judged against the following principles:

Is it fair?

Is it just?

Is it reasonable?

Does it discriminate against volunteers?

Is the outcome practicable and sustainable?

Is it in the best interest of the safety of the Victorian community?

And what do we have? We have a government that will not even refer back to the very charter that they supposedly supported. They have all gone on record supporting the volunteer charter, and yet today we have seen they are willing to go against everything they so-called believe in — everything you believe in — including discussion and consultation, and you are hurrying through legislation to tear apart the volunteers without giving them a say.

I know it is not tomorrow yet, but let us have a look at tomorrow's newspaper, because tomorrow's newspaper came out today. The *Herald Sun* wanted to make sure this is on the record:

New laws to give firefighters presumptive rights of cancer compensation will be tied to controversial changes to dismantle the CFA.

The extraordinary decision will mean that MPs who do not support the establishment of Fire Rescue Victoria would have to vote down presumptive rights for firefighters.

That is a disgrace. This government is putting conditions on presumptive rights legislation — the very legislation that, as minister, the member for Rowville made sure that we went to the election with. We would have delivered presumptive rights legislation for all Victorians, and we are proud of the fact that we were going to deliver it. We would have stood behind the minister. We put it out there in November before the election that we would have delivered it, and it would have been in place. I will put it on record again: if you would like to hurry it through, separate it from that legislation, and we are more than happy to help you out. You are obviously an incompetent lot over there, and you cannot do it.

It comes as the United Firefighters Union (UFU) this morning — and I think, Deputy Speaker, you actually might find this interesting — launched a series of television and radio advertisements to back the government's changes. How the hell did the UFU get television and radio ads ready before consultation, unless they drafted their own policy and put out it there? Because let us be honest, Peter Marshall is the voice you want for volunteers, is he not? Peter Marshall is the voice you want for volunteers! Peter Marshall is the man who has gone all the way to Queensland to say volunteers should not even get equal presumptive rights. So, Premier, that is the man you as Premier are siding with. You want a policy written? That is who has written it for him. The *Herald Sun* says:

One crossbench MP has already expressed discomfort about the fact the compensation package would be tied to broader reforms that dismantle the CFA.

I have been speaking to a few of the volunteers and a few of the staff out there, and they are actually saying that, while they were out there, the minister has been on record saying that he has already got the crossbenchers on board. It appears in the paper. So are there more volunteers that are liars?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BATTIN — Did you say they did not say that? He has just admitted there are more volunteers that are

liars. Congratulations, Deputy Premier, well done again. You are on a roll.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The level of interjection is way too high, and I again ask members to desist from calling each other liars. That word is not approved in this house.

Mr BATTIN — Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I will actually read another little quote here. Here is a quote from one of the articles that came out in the *Pakenham Gazette*:

The reaction is not good.

The volunteers are concerned the changes will change whole demographics of the area.

...

... it will change ... who has control on the fireground.

Who made that statement? Who made the statement that it is going to change it? It is none other than the officer-in-charge, a career firefighter, at Pakenham CFA station — the one man out there who is actually trying to stand up for volunteers. I will give you his number. I reckon you could take some advice from him on actually respecting volunteers and working with them, because Jim Dore has done that for a long time. We are proud to say that he is out there in the paper today saying, 'Guess what, Deputy Premier, you're wrong'.

The *Herald Sun* says:

... crossbench MPs are yet to be briefed on the bill, and have been left in the dark about the fundamental changes ...

I wonder if this was printed before or after they went down and briefed one crossbencher, James Purcell in the Legislative Council, yet they have not spoken to the other crossbenchers. Is there a bit of a bias here? Are they trying to buy one off? I am sure the Deputy Premier does not want it out there that he is already saying it. The *Herald Sun* says:

However, Mr Andrews has repeatedly sided with the UFU rather than the fire chiefs, many of whom have quit or been forced to resign over the saga.

And that is where the concern comes. There is nothing surer in this world than the fact that every person who has tried to stand up for volunteers in the CFA is gone. That includes great people. Joe Buffone was a fantastic chief, and I will go on record standing by him again while the Labor Party is trying to smudge his name. But

that is how Labor works. Just try and smear the name, and that is how it will work.

The Labor Party headhunted Lucinda Nolan. Lucinda Nolan had a respected career in the police force. She has done so much in our community. Any member of Parliament should stand side by side with her. But where is she? You have silenced her. Those on the other side have ensured that she cannot even speak out. She wanted to stand up for the volunteers and protect volunteers going forward, and I assure you that she would have.

Why did the entire CFA board — the entire board — not sign off on the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA)? They would not sign off on the EBA because they knew it was wrong and knew it would impact volunteers. It is funny that the member for Mordialloc wants to side with the government to make sure that it goes through, because those volunteers out there will really respect the member for Mordialloc for it, I am sure!

You actually have to go through and have a look at all those areas. For the member for Macedon, I wonder what is going to happen in her electorate, where you actually have volunteer firefighters out there who are standing up for their community, but the government wanting to push through legislation to push them away.

And on top of that, they keep talking about the CFA board and this new federal legislation. Try and tell me, why then was the MFB EBA not signed off? The MFB does not have volunteers, and we know the aim of Peter Marshall is to have no volunteers. The aim of this EBA and the aim of this whole decision is purely a political decision — a political decision by a government that has lost its way, a government that does not care, a government that will not deliver for our volunteers.

And you can even go onto their website — they have got a website now. The union has already put the website up. Feel free to go and type your address in, and it will come up with, 'It's not protected in Berwick'. I have typed in an address in Berwick, and the UFU has actually said that our area is not protected enough. Let me tell you about those proud volunteers at Berwick, Beaconsfield, Officer, Pakenham, Gembrook, Cockatoo, Clematis and Emerald. All of those volunteers down there are very proud to protect their communities, and it is about time the Premier stood up for them as well. Stand up for those volunteers down there.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BATTIN — I am finished, is that what they are saying? An article headed 'Daniel Andrews plays politics with cancer to split fire services' states:

Daniel Andrews is playing a shameful political game with cancer in order to ram through his legislation to split the state's fire services.

All we are saying is — and Deputy Speaker, let us be honest, it is not hard — split the legislation when you bring it into this place. We will help the government get through the cancer one, but we are going to continue to stand side by side with the volunteers out there who have protected our community for a long time. The article continues:

If you thought this Victorian Premier could not possibly stoop any lower in his dogmatic push to deliver more power to the United Firefighters Union and undermine volunteer CFA members, his decision to fold a cancer compensation bill into legislation to establish a new Fire Rescue Victoria agency shows there are no limits to his arrogance, contempt and autocracy.

And let us be honest. I know we are not allowed to use all these names for the Premier, but Dictator Dan should be the one that is out there. If anyone gets in his way, he sacks them and bullies them out. If anyone wants any further evidence of where this government sits, this government would not back the member for Brunswick, who was trying to stand up for volunteers. But they are backing the member for Tarneit and the member for Melton, both of whom have stolen from this Parliament.

To add insult to injury, one of Labor's own has actually come into shadow cabinet and spoken about the concerns this is going to cause for volunteers going forward. One of their former advisers who used to work with André Haermeyer is 100 per cent saying:

In a briefing to the coalition's frontbench yesterday, Mr Head raged against the fire services restructure, telling members that volunteers had been frozen out of the process ...

That is how this government works. Their target is to freeze out volunteers. Peter Marshall's aim is to get all the data he can and send it out to people. They are going to run a scare campaign in all those areas where volunteers proudly work.

What we want to see is a government that ensures volunteers are protected. They are already enshrined. It is a shame this government will not abide by the law. It is a shame this government will not commit to making sure that we keep those integrated stations going forward, not the co-located ones. We do not even know who is going to be in charge, but we need to make sure that all of those volunteers are protected. When I type any address into that facility on that website, I can tell you now that every time that it says that they are unsafe, that is a message directly from this government

to say, 'Volunteers, you're not good enough', and it needs to apologise for that.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I ask members to please refer to people by their correct titles. I do not like it that there are aspersions being cast on members in this house during this debate.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) — We see a man that is cooked leaving the chamber. We see a man who has had enough, whose desperation has hit the worst levels. We see a man in the member for Gembrook who put forward one of the most vile vilifications of career firefighters we have ever seen. We see a man who will never be fit to be a minister of the Crown in Victoria. We see a man who had the opportunity in this matter of public importance (MPI) to clarify the record, to set the record straight, but not once during his contribution to this MPI did he address the matters of concern, not once did he apologise for his vile attack on the career firefighters who served for hours in the first 5 hours of Black Saturday. It has been on more than one occasion that this has occurred. On more than three occasions the member for Gembrook has chosen to mislead this Parliament. He has chosen to put his political interests before the people of Victoria, before career firefighters and before volunteers.

In vilifying career firefighters the member for Gembrook brings back up all the scars of Black Saturday. He brings back up the 173 people who lost their lives, the thousands of people who live on with the scars and the many career and volunteer firefighters who still live with post-traumatic stress disorder from those terrible events. To politicise such an event and such a landmark inquiry like the Black Saturday royal commission is absolutely disgraceful, and one has to question the member for Gembrook's judgement in doing so. One has to question the fitness of an individual who serves an interface community which has seen terrible fires over the years — through Upper Beaconsfield, through Emerald, all the way up to Warburton, back to 1939 in Warburton East, where those communities suffered great damage during terrible fires. One has to question a member of Parliament who represents those fragile areas on the interface of metropolitan Melbourne and his ability to turn straight to political attacks on career firefighters.

It has been clarified on a number of occasions that of course the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Country Fire Authority and Department of Sustainability and Environment firefighters served on Black Saturday. In a desperate attempt to evade the truth, the member for

Gembrook suggested he was only referring to the Bunyip Ridge fires. He did not make that clarification on three other occasions. For him to then try to scurry out of this place and not answer the questions about what he meant and what his intentions were cannot go away.

For the alternative government on that side, who are putting themselves forward to Victorians as an opposition, to have any credibility, this needs to be addressed. To have any credibility the Leader of the Opposition cannot say on 3AW that he simply is not aware of the transcript, that he simply does not know the comments. It has now been well over a fortnight, and still the Leader of the Opposition has not addressed the fundamental issue of whether he maintains confidence in the member for Gembrook, and whether he supports the sinister attack on our career firefighters and the vilification of their service.

And of course the member for Gembrook has form. The member for Gembrook talked about presumptive rights legislation in here and prosecuted presumptive rights legislation, but the member for Gembrook was a member of the committee that conducted the Fiskville inquiry. He was the shadow Minister for Emergency Services who was put onto that committee to represent the opposition. He was the emergency services spokesperson for the opposition during that landmark inquiry — a bipartisan inquiry that had landmark findings and that found an absolute link between historical practices at Fiskville and a threat to firefighter health and safety now. We continue to monitor now, to this very day, the chemicals that are in firefighters. We are monitoring them now, career and volunteer.

The inquiry heard from Diane Potter, the wife of Brian Potter who uncovered this terrible cover-up at Fiskville in 2011 and who courageously came forward to the *Herald Sun*. Ruth Lamperd and Stephen Drill from the *Herald Sun* uncovered this in telling Brian Potter's story.

The member for Gembrook jumped off that inquiry before the first hearing. What were the reasons that he gave?

An honourable member — Because he was too busy.

Mr RICHARDSON — He was too busy to hear the hundreds of submissions and the evidence and submissions put forward — too busy for a landmark inquiry 50 years in the making, too busy politicising, too busy getting down into gutter politics, too busy to stand up for career and volunteer firefighters who were pleading for their story to be heard, pleading for their

story to be told. The member for Gembrook did not read one submission, did not hear one piece of evidence.

For him to come in here today to talk about presumptive rights legislation is an outrage and hypocrisy at its worst. The member for Gembrook cannot stand here and talk about presumptive rights legislation when he jumped off a landmark inquiry into historical practices at Fiskville.

But of course what we saw last sitting week was not in isolation. In the company of the member for Gembrook we had an outrageous statement made by another shadow minister. This goes to the culture of the coalition, both to the Liberal and National parties. Many members in this place would have heard the member for Ovens Valley's comment across the chamber that Fiskville was a set-up. This is the most disgraceful and despicable comment that I have ever heard while I have been a member of state Parliament, a federal adviser or a state adviser. To turn around and say that Fiskville was a set-up — and he called it a set-up — is an absolute disgrace.

The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals days later, nearly a fortnight later, have not made one statement about whether they stand by the deplorable, disgusting and despicable comments of the member for Ovens Valley, interjecting that Fiskville was merely a set-up. It is absolutely outrageous. It was made in the company of the member for Gembrook. It was heard by everyone in this chamber. The member for Gembrook turned a blind eye. The member for Ovens Valley is an absolute disgrace.

Mr McCurdy — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would like you to bring the member back to what he is supposed to be talking about. I would like him to withdraw his comments about me because he knows what he has said about me are absolute lies. I did not say — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr McCurdy — Shameful, absolutely shameful. Withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Mordialloc to withdraw.

Mr RICHARDSON — I withdraw. So we see a pattern of behaviour by those opposite in their vilification of volunteer and career firefighters. For the member for Gembrook to jump off the Fiskville inquiry goes to the very point and the essence of the 100 000 people who went through Fiskville, 100 000 people who were exposed to the historical

chemicals and practices that needed to be exposed. It took the Labor government to lead that parliamentary inquiry and to put it on the record, and to put forward 34 recommendations that underpin what we will do in the future to avoid that ever happening again.

The challenge today for the Leader of the Opposition is to look career firefighters in the eye and to say to them whether he supports the member for Gembrook's comments about the service of career firefighters on Black Saturday. Does he support the obfuscation of the member for Gembrook in trying to weasel his way out of those comments by then suggesting that he was referring to only the Bunyip state forest fire, when career firefighters were already serving many days before?

If we look deeper into this, if someone who is aspiring to be a minister of the Crown can so easily get down into gutter politics that he suggests that his comments were gut-wrenching, I will tell the house and the member for Gembrook what is gut-wrenching. It is gut-wrenching for the families that try to live on through the horrors of Black Saturday; it is gut-wrenching for the people who are still trying to pick up their lives and access the funding that so many Victorians generously donated when they gave their money over the years proceeding; it is gut-wrenching for career firefighters and volunteer firefighters who try to put themselves forward time and time again to serve their community while living with post-traumatic stress disorder. That is gut-wrenching — not a sinister political attack that should be called out for what it is.

The member for Gembrook has shown that he is not fit to ever be a minister of the Crown in Victoria. If you descend into that kind of sinister bullying and intimidation to try to push forward your political agenda, then you will never be fit to serve in this great state of Victoria.

So the Leader of the Opposition has a challenge: does he back the member for Gembrook or does he sack him? If he backs him, then he is putting forward a protection of someone who is very comfortable fudging the truth and putting forward an attack on our career firefighters. That is the challenge to the Leader of the Opposition.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Before I call the member for Murray Plains, I remind members of standing orders in this house that you will not speak in this chamber unless you are in your allocated seat. I remind the member for Ovens Valley that he took a point of order while he was out of his seat. I also would ask the member for Euroa to cease interjecting from her unallocated seat.

Mr Walsh — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, can I draw to your attention that the member for Ovens Valley is actually a shadow minister, even though he does not sit on the —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr Walsh — Did I ask for your opinion, dickhead?

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I appreciate that, and I withdraw that.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) — I rise to speak on the matter of public importance before the house. I remind the member for Monbulk, the old plastic policeman over here, that this motion should actually be a bit longer. There should actually be some respect shown to the member for Brunswick as the former minister. There should be some respect shown to Lucinda Nolan, as the former CEO of the Country Fire Authority (CFA). There should be some respect shown to the former CFA board.

There should be some respect shown to Joe Buffone, the former chief fire officer, someone who dedicated his whole career to the fire service in Victoria and whose reputation was absolutely trashed by the minister at the table, the Minister for Emergency Services. The minister at the table is happy to go out and protect the member for Melton, he is happy to go out and protect the roting member for Tarneit, but he was not happy to go out and protect his chief fire officer at that particular time. He was very happy to go out and just absolutely trash his reputation, but he will stick up for the roting members for Tarneit and Melton.

This motion should also show respect to Peter Rau, the former chief fire officer of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), someone who had to retire because of ill health. There were reports that that ill health was partly brought on by the fact that he was so persecuted by this government in his particular role. Those people, as well as the volunteers and the paid firefighters, should be shown respect in this motion.

Can I say that the member for Gembrook does a very good job as a local member and a shadow minister. I am proud to serve on the front bench with the member for Gembrook, so let us get that very, very clear at the start.

My very first role in public life was actually as secretary of the Jarklin fire brigade, so I have been a secretary of a fire brigade. When I bought my own farm and moved, I was a member of both the Yando and the Appin South fire brigades, with all the training that

involved, all the Sunday rosters and all the work they did. So I have been a member of three different fire brigades and was very proud to serve as a volunteer for quite a few years while I was a farmer. I must say that, particularly with the Jarklin fire brigade given that it was actually on the Loddon Valley Highway, in the time I was there I think we probably attended more car crashes than we did fires. We know that volunteer firefighters serve multiple roles in our communities where there is no State Emergency Service. So with those incidents I have been involved in a number of fire brigades. The CFA often sell their old fire trucks and we bought an old Woosang fire truck and used it as our private fire vehicle on the farm as well. So I have had an active involvement as a volunteer with fire brigades over that time.

What has happened over time is that the United Firefighters Union (UFU) and its secretary, Peter Marshall, who has had unrealistic demands of the government and for whatever reason he now has leverage over the Premier and the Minister for Emergency Services, want something that is too extreme and that will disadvantage volunteers. We have seen the continual debate in the public and in this place about what was or was not in that particular enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA), that there was going to be a right of veto over management of the CFA and the way they treat volunteers. That is why the people I mentioned when I started my contribution have all now left the CFA management or board, because they could not succumb to the bullying of the Premier to make sure that that EBA was rammed through over that time.

We have had the intervention of the Turnbull government. I must give full credit to Malcolm Turnbull and his minister for the legislative changes they made to make sure that volunteers were actually respected in any EBA. What we have now is effectively a situation where the CFA and the MFB are going to be destroyed as we know them just so that the Premier can ram through a dirty, rotten EBA that favours Peter Marshall and the UFU.

I refer to the press clippings over the last couple of days and some of the comments of the volunteers. Paul Nicoll, the captain of the Echuca brigade, said:

It's against the volunteer charter. We should be consulted. The opinion is that the changes are being made to ram through the EBA. The question we ask is, 'Would the changes be made if the EBA wasn't in dispute? ... Obviously there will be some effects on how we do business, like do we lose John Cutting —

who is the district 20 operations manager.

Andrew Ford, the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) chief executive, said:

The Victorian government wants to use their new fire service structure to ram through the union's agreement, giving them large scale control over Victoria's fire services. Volunteers will be replaced by paid staff in delivering urban services with volunteers effectively relegated to a secondary role. This will undermine community safety and cost taxpayers and their households an arm and a leg.

I think that is one of the issues that has not been discussed at this stage. The Premier gave a commitment that there would be no increase in the fire services levy for two years with what is being proposed. We all know this is the Premier that said tearing up the east-west link contract would not cost \$1, and what did it cost? It was \$1.3 billion. There are reports that these changes to fire services in Victoria will cost upwards of \$1 billion in the future, and it is people who own property and pay the fire services levy that will be paying through the nose for this Premier's cheap, short-term, nasty political fix to his own political problem.

The Cosgrove and Pine Lodge CFA captain, Ross Harmer, said the changes were simply part of the government's agenda. He said:

There hasn't been any discussion, it has just been pushed through.

The theme is the same as you go around the state, with volunteers right across Victoria very, very concerned about this. We saw the demonstrations last year when this all happened. What you are seeing now is I think an absolute galvanising of the determination of the volunteers across Victoria. The volunteers up until now had been saying, 'We are not going to be political; we are just looking for a good outcome for the service we provide to our community'. Volunteers are now coming up unsolicited, saying, 'If you want someone to help you at the next election, we will do whatever it takes to get rid of the Premier of Victoria because we despise what he is doing to our fire brigades'. They are coming up unsolicited and saying that they are going to help.

Particularly the regional members of the Labor government on the other side of this house might have felt really, really happy when Peter Marshall and his colleagues doorknocked 43 000 homes and had 700 people manning booths at the last election. I just say to some of the members on the other side that the volunteers are coming for you with baseball bats because they just do not want to see you in government next time around. They actually want to see a government that will govern for all of Victoria. They do not want a Premier just for Melbourne. They do not want a government just for Melbourne but a

government for all of Victoria that shows respect for volunteers.

There has been no respect shown to volunteers through this particular process. If you go to Owen O'Keefe, who is a volunteer from the western district firefighting area, he is quoted in the *Weekly Times* as saying:

Daniel Andrews is treating volunteers with contempt. If this goes ahead volunteers will see their work isn't valued and it will be difficult to maintain numbers.

But the fight's not over yet. It has to get through Parliament.

That is where the rub will be in the immediate future. If you go to the Warrnambool *Standard* of 20 May, a CFA representative, Owen O'Keefe, said that James Purcell in the Legislative Council sold his vote to the government. He said:

... the first priority of the VFBV would be to lobby upper house member for Western Victoria James Purcell, to oppose the plan.

Again, for those people who sit on the crossbenches in the upper house, the CFA volunteers will be knocking on their doors and making sure they actually hold this government to account for not consulting before proposing their legislative changes, because it just does not do the right thing by volunteers or by the safety of Victorians.

I finish with those senior fire and emergency people who are running around the country toeing the government's line and selling this particular concept. If they think nothing is going to change for volunteers out of this, I say that they still believe in fairies at the bottom of the garden, they still believe in Santa Claus and they still believe in the tooth fairy. If they have a tooth fall out, they had better put it in a glass of water on the bench and hope someone puts some money in it, because that is what they believe in if they believe these changes being proposed will not actually change our fire service for the worse and make it more unsafe for Victorians in the future.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I rise in support of this matter of public importance (MPI). On this side of the house we support all firefighters, career and volunteer. The other side merely romanticise the idea of volunteerism. They romanticise it; they put it on like a cheap coat. They romanticise it; they have never backed it. They never backed volunteerism when they were in government. To them it means getting a cheap fire service and undermining a unionised workforce. On Black Saturday we worked together, volunteer and career, and we have always done so.

What this lot on the other side has been trying to do is tear up a family. They have been trying to tear brother from brother, sister from sister for their own political ends. It is the same with their fellow travellers in Canberra. The reason we have come to this juncture is that because of the interference of Canberra there is now no ability to confirm an enterprise bargaining agreement with the career workforce of our fire service, the Country Fire Authority (CFA). If the other lot had not interfered in that way, it may have been possible.

When they were in government what did we see? They halved the operational funds for volunteer brigades in my electorate. There was no romanticising of volunteers then. Personal protective equipment was not available, there was no availability of pagers and they gutted the funds to the fire services. Those on the other side were not then standing up for volunteers. When they refused to go with the CFA's priorities in terms of what stations needed to be upgraded on the grounds of safety, particularly those in interface areas, they did not speak up.

Not once in his contribution did we hear the member for Gembrook mention Black Saturday, and I do not think he should ever mention it again. Those words should never come out of his mouth. He knows nothing about what happened on that day. When he could have done something about Fiskville, he resigned from the committee. It was easier for him to be out in the community causing trouble than coming up with a solution. His fellow travellers on the other side, whether it is Simon Ramsay or Gordon Rich-Phillips or others on that side in the upper house on the six or seven occasions that they voted down presumptive rights legislation, doubted the connection between cancer and firefighting.

Where were those who are standing up now and saying this is all a travesty? They were nowhere to be seen. Where were they when career firefighter Brian Potter and firefighter after firefighter who were at Fiskville died from cancer? Where were they when neighbours like the parents-in-law of the former member for Essendon, Justin Madden, both perished from cancer on their farm next door to Fiskville? The member for Gembrook could have been part of the inquiry getting to the bottom of it, but he disappeared.

Where were they when the volunteer captain of the Port Campbell fire brigade died of cancer as a result of his exposure at Fiskville? Were they talking about the safety of volunteers at Fiskville? No. They were talking about trying to keep it open. I know all about Allan Radford's passing, as he was my uncle. Where were they in discussions about not only the connection

between cancer and firefighting but the connection between post-traumatic stress disorder and firefighting? They were nowhere to be seen. They did not put extra funding into supporting the firefighters and their families who were still suffering after Black Saturday.

I want to go through the four maydays I heard when I was on duty on Black Saturday. For those on the other side who may be ignorant of maydays, it is when you are at peril of losing your life. The first mayday I heard was from the Wollert crew who were burnt over north-east of Whittlesea. I know Colin Clune, a volunteer firefighter, was seriously burnt. I do not remember whether there were career firefighters in that crew with Colin, but there may well have been, because they were in every crew. We were mixed together and fighting for our community. What the other side do not understand is that often volunteers are career firefighters themselves. It is like you are trying to pull one arm off a person.

Mayday number two was from the Craigieburn forward response vehicle that was burnt over. Career and volunteer firefighters were in the crew. My heart was in my mouth as I thought that some of those people from Craigieburn were going to die. Mayday number three was from the Whittlesea tanker, which was burnt over for 45 minutes at Humevale. There were a teacher in that crew and a number of other people whose professions I cannot remember now, but it also included Richard Gardiner and Tom Upton, who lived in that local area and are now career firefighters. They were volunteers then, but they are now career firefighters. When you dis career firefighters, you are dising volunteers. Tom Upton did not know for 48 hours whether his family was alive. He knew that his neighbours and his best friends across the road, who were members of the Liberal Party, were dead. He slept under a desk in that station for two nights. That from a volunteer who is now a career firefighter. That is who the member for Gembrook disgracefully denigrated with his words.

Then there was another mayday when the North Warrandyte tanker was caught. It had crashed; we were the nearest truck to it. We could not get to them, and we thought they were going to die. We thought we were going to hear them die. My crew leader was a Metropolitan Fire Brigade firefighter, and he was the previous captain of my brigade. We worked hand in glove that day.

How dare you! You people are disgraceful. Every week I talk to another firefighter who is still suffering from that day. I spoke to some veterans last week from the RSL who are suffering from difficulties after their war

service. They had been in ward 17 at the Austin Hospital. They said that every week they are in there, they are at risk of suicide. Every week they are in there, there are firefighters there from Black Saturday. Every time you bastards on the other side — and that is exactly what you are — make those references, you bring back those horrible memories. How dare you!

Ms McLeish — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Yan Yean used some very unparliamentary language.

Ms GREEN — I withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! The member has withdrawn. I understand that these are passionate issues, and I ask that all members respect that and also respect each other in this place. I ask the member for Yan Yean to continue her contribution.

Ms GREEN — Those on the other side need to have a good hard look at themselves having someone as contemptuous as Brad Battin on their front bench. He has no place on that front bench, he has no place in this Parliament — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! All members need to make sure that they refer to members by their correct titles in this place. I assume the member is referring to the member for Gembrook.

Ms GREEN — The member for Gembrook has no place being on that front bench, and he has no place interfering in the operation of firefighting services. He needs to understand that firefighters are a family. We were a family on Black Saturday; we will always be a family. On this side of the house we care about what happens to those firefighters, whether they are career or volunteer firefighters. We will support them, we will resource them and we are proposing a new generation of fire services in this state. We care how their buildings are built, how they are supported and whether they get cancer or not. I support the MPI.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) — The matter of public importance (MPI) raised by the member for Monbulk this afternoon is clearly another example of him playing politics. He is the first to accuse everybody else of playing politics, but this MPI is clear evidence that he is well and truly in that game. Here the minister is trying to discredit the opposition and create a wedge between volunteer and career firefighters. The minister is very much driving a political agenda. His credibility is also to be questioned. Many of us in here will remember the day that he referred to protective services officers (PSOs) as ‘plastic police’. At that time we had PSOs

sitting in the gallery — those officers who protect us in doing their job — and he was very quick to condemn them and their role.

The minister’s credibility is also to be questioned because in a meeting on 30 May 2016 with his own Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers he said, and I quote:

In terms of the fire services review, we accepted the majority of the recommendations out of the review, but we made it absolutely clear when we responded to it that there will be no merger of the fire services in any way.

These were the minister’s own words at a meeting with his CFA volunteers. I think if they have a good look at what he is doing now — and believe me, they know exactly what is on the table and what he is doing now — they will see that, if anyone should be condemned in this instance, it is him. His credibility is seriously challenged, and it is with some disbelief that I look at this MPI that he has raised.

The split between the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and the CFA is very interesting in itself, because the CFA did not want to be split up, the MFB certainly did not want to be abolished and the emergency services commissioner said that this was not needed. So we have the minister bringing legislation into this house, and he is the one who is trying to divide the fire services. This MPI is about support and respect for our firefighters, and yet the minister who is bringing in legislation to make these changes is the one who is absolutely not supporting and not respecting all firefighters.

I have said many times in this house that I represent 51 CFA brigades — they are all volunteer brigades — across four districts, districts 12, 13, 14 and 23. Those brigades are mostly rural fire brigades, but we have urban ones as well. There are some places like Alexandra that have the urban and the rural fire brigades under the one roof. There are plenty of brigades that have had professional firefighters join them more recently, so those that are in the MFB may also be in the volunteer brigades.

Also, most of my electorate has been burnt, as had most of my previous electorate of Seymour. As the member for Eildon I cover areas from Powelltown to Reefton and along the Warburton Highway coming up the back to Cambarville and Marysville, the alpine areas around Mansfield, and certainly also Kinglake, Marysville and surrounds, which were burnt on Black Saturday. When I was the member for Seymour we had the Kilmore-Mickleham fires, which took out a huge area there as well. So most of my electorate has been burnt in fairly recent times.

Some of the older people do recall the devastating 1939 fires. They were absolutely horrific fires. You can imagine trying to fight those fires in those times, when the equipment that they had was not sophisticated in any way. If you go to a number of fire stations you will see on display — I think Strath Creek is one that has had displays at various times — the sort of gear that they fought fires with back then. Let me tell the house, the people who were around and remember those fires certainly recall their devastating impact. Likewise everybody in my electorate recalls Black Saturday. Everyone knows where they were and what they were doing, and everybody has stories. Of course there were many other fires around as well.

The people who fought the fires there were all skilled and/or professional, and the changes mooted here absolutely need to be put on hold. The volunteer brigades are calling for them to be put on hold for a few months, at least until the detail becomes apparent about exactly what they mean and how the governance structures would work, and in particular they are very keen to have an impact assessment completed.

This will impact the volunteers, the brigades and the equipment. We know that whether you are an MFB or a CFA member you will fight structural fires — at homes, factories and shops — where the fire is pretty well in the one spot. You could be attending motor vehicle accidents, major hazards, gas incidents or bushfires and wildfires. The MFB — the career firefighters — have come up and helped, and when they have helped with bushfires and wildfires their comments are, ‘Gee, how different is this when you have a moving fire?’. So many factors can change the direction of the fire — the gullies, the hills, the steepness and the change in wind patterns. All of these sorts of things can affect the way a fire burns. People who have been dealing mostly with structural fires find that a little bit more dangerous. The opposite is true as well. Some of the CFA — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms McLEISH — These guys opposite are challenging what I am saying. I am going to give you some direct quotes from people to verify what I am saying, because I will deal with the facts and not the absolute misstatements and mistruths that you peddle over there, because you are very quick to peddle mistruths. But I am actually out on the ground talking to people who work in this field and I have talked to the professionals — they are all professionals — the career firefighters as well as the volunteers. Often in regard to the large structural fires the volunteers acknowledge

that maybe the career guys are better equipped to deal with them.

But I do want to talk also about some of the other firefighters that we have. We have the forest fire management crews, who do a lot of work around the suppression of fires and containing outbreaks and looking at the risks. They do a lot of the planned burns and the prevention of fires — the slashing, the mowing and creating fuel breaks. This involves maintaining parks and tracks and fulfilling education roles as well. This happens 12 months of the year. There are not fires in the forest 12 months of the year. In fact you can be lucky and have very few fires in forested areas. They happen usually because of lightning strikes. It is not unusual for that to occur. Even in the last summer, when we did not have a huge number of fires, we certainly had those lightning strikes that cause fires.

These guys do a whole bunch of things, such as firewood collection and maintaining fire towers, but a couple of other things that they do include disentangling whales or other animals that have been oiled as well.

Mr Richardson interjected.

Ms McLEISH — Whales. I think the member for Mordialloc ought to have a look at the forest fire management website to understand the responsibilities that they fulfil; the coastal brigades do this sort of work. The member for Mordialloc should find out a little bit more about what goes on because he does not know.

VicForests also plays a role. The equipment and resources that it provided on Black Saturday were absolutely critical. We also have citizens fighting fires on their own properties, neighbouring properties or those of friends. I know Robert Hiscock did that during the Mickleham-Kilmore fires. He has his own truck. The number of people who spoke to me about the houses that he saved was astronomical. My cousin Adrian, who is a city boy with a heart condition, came up and helped us on Black Saturday. He said, ‘I’d rather die fighting fires, helping you, than sitting here on the couch’.

The specific comments that I heard after the Kilmore-Mickleham fires were very good examples of career firefighters working together with the volunteer brigades; there was appreciation of different skills. It was the career firefighters who acknowledged the challenges of fires moving up steep gullies, where they relied on the local knowledge and the expertise of the CFA to help them and guide them in those situations. Those opposite need to take heed and understand that

we need to strengthen and support the relationship between the career and volunteer firefighters. This is critical for the protection of Victoria and Victorian communities.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) — I begin by acknowledging all of the emergency services workers of all agencies, staff and volunteer, who fought the Black Saturday fires. No matter where you were or whether you were first or last on scene, it was an extremely difficult period. I also acknowledge the loss of 173 people, over 400 people injured on the day, 7500 people displaced and 3500 homes or structures destroyed. I would also like to make special acknowledgement of the firefighters visiting Parliament today, staff and volunteer. Under parliamentary privilege recently their trust has been abused, but I can assure them they are welcome here and we will address this matter.

I would just like to start today by giving an account of a colleague's day on Black Saturday, and it must be noted that this was a pretty average day for most people on Black Saturday:

We watched the fire grow and envelop the entire area!

Once there the incident control centre contacted us with the news that a 16-year-old and his dad had been burnt and were now trapped and disoriented! Could we help ...

We turned our ground ops vehicle around and drove into the fire! I was terrified ... Whilst trying to reach the injured family we were impacted by the wind change and endured a significant burnover ... I remember seeing the temp gauge on the dash —

of the vehicle —

reading 68 degrees —

Celsius —

We made it to the injured family and delivered them to the waiting air ambulance on the highway.

I also learned that my brother's property at Strathewen had been destroyed ...

I went home late, tired, scared and confused ... I watched the news and cried!

The next few days were spent working out of Kinglake! Terrifying ...

Over the next few weeks I spent most days helping the recovery! I've never been so scared!

I would just like to say to those opposite that I have colleagues who have been to hell and back because of what they experienced on Black Saturday, and some have actually committed suicide. What makes me truly

sick is the fact that I am sitting down in Parliament across from members opposite, many of whom I work with and have a professional respect for, but not one single coalition MP has given me professional respect or indeed given all our Country Fire Authority (CFA) firefighters, volunteer and staff, professional respect and spoken up and called out the member for Gembrook for statements designed only to attack firefighters and their families.

I call on all coalition MPs to find a pinch of the strength shown every day by our police, our ambos, our State Emergency Service volunteers and firefighters and to come out and say whether they actually support the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Gembrook, in his defamatory comments or whether they support removing him. You know he meant them, just like every reasonable person in our community does, and by remaining silent you are actually supporting him. People will come up to you on the street and they will ask where you stand on this, and you need to either support firefighters or support the member for Gembrook.

As a former firefighter who worked on the Bunyip State Park fire on Black Saturday, I am totally appalled by the member for Gembrook's comments. The only answer we need to know is: who is going to be his replacement as the shadow emergency services minister? The only thing more appalling is that the Leader of the Opposition is still fully supporting the shadow minister victimising firefighters who put their lives on the line during Australia's worst natural disaster.

He was caught out by the media making inaccurate and disgraceful statements, and only when he was caught out did he decide that he would pick one of 400 fires. It just happened to be the Bunyip fire, and I was there. He was also wrong with that one. But he has not said this just once; he has said it no less than three times in Parliament and once on radio. There is no confusing what he meant or the motivation behind this, because he has said it three times over the last year. This dialogue is continuous. On two different bills last year he said that we can go back to Black Saturday when for the first 6 hours it was only volunteers fighting the fires in Victoria, and no doubt the volunteers did a great job. In a different speech on the very same day he said:

A good example would be Black Saturday, where for the first 5 or 6 hours of Black Saturday there were only volunteers on the ground.

He has misled our Parliament and our community at least four times on this one issue alone, and today I stand here and ask for consequences. The member for Gembrook will always from here on in be known

shamefully and rightly so as the man who belittled and demeaned veterans of Black Saturday.

We have even had misinformation in the chamber today. I note that the member for Murray Plains told us that volunteers are going to be replaced by staff and that volunteers will have their tankers taken off them. What a load of rubbish. I have volunteers and staff coming to me and saying, 'I do not trust a word that comes out of Mr Battin's mouth. He is a clown'.

The opposition shadow cabinet have no credibility while the member for Gembrook sits amongst them. Leadership is hard, and while the Leader of the Opposition lets this go and does nothing about this disgraceful behaviour, I believe it shows that he does not have the stomach for leadership. He should sack the member for Gembrook, and if he cannot, you lot and his shadow cabinet should sack them both. Our community will never, ever trust the member for Gembrook or the opposition leader again, and there are lots of reasons why. I am going to go through a couple of examples now.

Near the anniversary of Black Saturday this year it was printed in the newspaper that the member for Gembrook claimed that we were losing volunteers due to industrial negotiations. Representatives from Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) and the CFA rebutted these claims, but they tried it again this week, saying that changes to modernise the fire service would crush the CFA.

The opposition leader himself tweeted a picture with text saying, 'This is why Daniel Andrews wants to smash the CFA — the unionised MFB campaigning for Labor'. Within 1 hour the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) had rebutted the claim online, stating that these people were merely recruiting firefighters on a training course.

Just last Friday we had the ridiculous assertion from the opposition leader, who clearly knows about as much about emergency services as the shadow emergency services minister, that New South Wales firefighters come down to Victoria to help us fight fires more than we go up there, because they have got more firefighters. He is actually wrong: New South Wales has got more firefighters and they are down here all the time. In fact, they were down here for the mine fire.

Of course we have got the infamous fundraising campaign. The *Herald Sun* reported that the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) dispute exploded on 1 June, but the Liberal Party had the domain name handsoffthecfa.org.au already registered a month

earlier, making money off volunteers. Then the opposition leader also claimed in an opinion piece that CFA volunteers cannot fight fires unless there are seven unionised firefighters there to supervise them. I remember the federal Minister for Employment, Michaelia Cash, coming out with that one and talking about, I think, firefighter Don. She had to admit that she was wrong and that she had not even read the EBA. And, of course, we had the Black Saturday statements last week.

And so the lies go on and on. We even heard the opposition do a comedy routine today and tell us that the excuse for the member for Gembrook is that he was extolling the virtues of volunteers by blackening the name of staff members on Black Saturday. It is like they believe that the more you mislead Parliament and our community, the more it is perceived as the truth, and all I ask is for consequences for wilfully misleading Parliament and defaming firefighters. This is directly from the people who denied Fiskville was an issue, denied there was a link between cancer and firefighters and voted down presumptive rights legislation not once, not twice but three times in four long, dark years of government. There is no reason to trust them.

In contrast we are introducing a modern fire service, presumptive rights legislation, a new training facility at Ballan and \$100 million for CFA firefighters. What do they do? The opposition goes for advice to one member of the VFBV. They do not talk to firefighters at all. There are a lot of good people asking themselves right now, 'If the member for Gembrook and the opposition leader can make up stories so easily about our friends and colleagues, staff or volunteer, when will they turn on us, and will our local MP be just as silent and not stand up for us when they lie about us?'

There has never been a minister in the Victorian Parliament able to ostracise the majority of their portfolio in such an efficient way. It is easy to say that you represent a body of people, but I would say that no-one supports this member at all. They have no faith in the member for Gembrook, so I ask: if a minister does not really represent anyone in the portfolio, what is the point of that minister? He must go. He must resign or he must be sacked.

Have no doubt, the impact of the shadow minister's statements on the mental health of firefighters is absolutely significant. Volunteers and staff, VFBV and the United Firefighters Union are telling me that they want nothing to do with him at all. In our Parliament's history I very much doubt that we will ever have another emergency services shadow minister who could manage to denigrate and alienate staff firefighters of all

the services — CFA, MFB, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria — not once but twice in a single week. I doubt we will ever hear again a politician deliberately exploit the deaths of 173 people and expect an apology on social media to cut it.

He is the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, apparently a representative for all emergency services, who quit the most important inquiry in fire services history because it did not suit his politics. The thing he does not seem to understand is that no matter whether we are staff or volunteer, whether we are male or female, whether we are MFB, CFA or DELWP, it makes no difference. When you lie to firefighters, you lie to a whole community of people, a strong community moulded by events like Black Saturday and like Fiskville.

Do you know what? I hear people from the opposition talking about Fiskville today. I am the one who has to go to the doctor to get a blood test, not them. Do you know how that makes me feel? I do not know whether there is a time bomb in my body. I am not sure how that affects my family. Every day our State Emergency Service and CFA volunteers and staff experience horrific incidents — people torn apart or burnt. Some ex-soldiers I have worked with actually told me that they saw more trauma as firefighters than on the battlefield as soldiers.

The member for Gembrook has demonised the veterans of the worst natural disaster in Australia's history. What he has done also is made us an embarrassment. This is actually known globally now as an Australian minister who attacked veterans of Australia's worst natural disaster.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) — I rise to speak on the matter of public importance (MPI) in the name of the member for Monbulk, and specifically that this house 'acknowledges the critical contribution of all firefighters, career and volunteer'. I think even those initial words tell us quite a lot about the member for Monbulk and the priorities of this government. When I listened to the member for Monbulk speak on this, as he is wont to do, he used the phrase 'career and volunteer' 11 times. How many times did he use the phrase 'volunteer and career', I wonder? Of course it was not 11 times, not 10 times; it was only once. That is what we saw all the way through this sad and angry contribution from the member for Monbulk — repeatedly, I might add, asking for protection from the Chair. He could not even enthuse his own side of the chamber — Mr Three Votes himself — and he could not get the Chair's notice very well.

This is the man who has deceived his own brigades, repeatedly told his own brigades one thing and then gone off and done something else. He has led a campaign of misinformation on consultation. Most recently he said that the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) have been consulted, as is required by law, when they have not been. Going off after you have announced your legislation and speaking to a number of brigades — and in fact the Ballarat integrated brigade was one of those — for 20 minutes with 10 minutes of questions is not consultation. But he has led a campaign of misinformation about this and he has been called out.

I think really we need to think about what has driven this all the way along, and of course it is because this government, this minister and this Premier are intimidated. They are beholden to Peter Marshall and the United Firefighters Union (UFU). This is by far the most pressing political problem for the government; it is a problem that they have not been able to solve. Of course the Premier famously said that it had come to an end and he had fixed it. Well, he did not fix it, did he? Not 12 months ago and not now. He is saying, 'We've got another model, but we have a few things to get through', and this is apparently their latest fix. Their latest fix of course is all at the behest of Peter Marshall of the UFU and to pay him off. They are an intimidated, cowed government beholden to this man.

I have been consulting with my brigades and I can tell you that they are not very happy. The Stawell brigade has vowed to do everything they can to stop the state government's foul plan. Captain Darryl Wagstaff of the Maryborough brigade has said that there has not been any consultation in regard to the changes. The Country Fire Authority (CFA) is unimpressed with the Andrews government's lack of consultation with volunteers. They have not been consulted, and they know the VFBV has not been either.

After we sat through the sad little attempt by the Minister for Emergency Services to make a contribution we then had the member for Mordialloc. That was really quite an extraordinary contribution, because he began by complaining that there was politicisation of the issue. How dare he? The government is politicising cancer. Tying presumptive rights legislation to the biggest political crisis of the Andrews Labor government is politicisation. For the member for Mordialloc to get up and suggest, 'Oh, you are politicising something else' when they are trying to hide behind the greatest politicisation of cancer of all time is shameful. We stand ready to support presumptive rights legislation. There is complete agreement on presumptive rights legislation. Yet the government clearly knows that we are not on

side with their split of the CFA and their reworking of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), but by putting the issues together they have politicised cancer. Shame on them.

The less said about the diatribe from the member for Yan Yean the better. The member for Yan Yean is now the buddy MP for the electorate of Ripon. She is around Ripon — dribbling around Ripon — every week. The more I see her there, the better. The previous buddy from the government side was at least credible, but of course he is the current Speaker and does not come anymore. Now they have sent us the member for Yan Yean. If she is the representative of the Andrews Labor government, here is a tip to the government: she is not doing you any favours. She can come any time to Ripon. I am very happy to see her in Ripon.

The whole reason we are here with this MPI is that this government has fought for years and years to try and get some sort of resolution to the problem they have created with the enterprise bargaining agreement with the CFA and the very strong desire of the UFU to have influence within the CFA. They have tried a few things over that time. They have tried jawboning, and that did not work. They tried sacking everybody, whether it was sacking the board, the CEO or the fire officer or making the minister go. We have had such a long, long list of CFA and MFB people forced out in one way or another, but still they could not get what they wanted. They tried all of that, but they could still not get what they wanted. Peter Marshall and the UFU are going constantly into government offices, knocking on doors and continuing to bring staff to tears and bully them. He has just kept up that pressure and the government has flipped over once, has flipped over twice and this is their latest attempt. It is a shameful, shameful attempt. It is shameful not only in setting out to destroy the CFA, but it is also a model that none of the eight reviews that the Minister for Emergency Services is so keen on quoting recommended.

Mr Katos — Not one.

Ms STALEY — Not one. None of the eight reviews recommended that this happen to the CFA and MFB. So there is no evidence for this. Who did recommend this model? That would of course be Peter Marshall — Peter Marshall of the UFU. He likes this model, I am sure. It increases his power. Shame about the CFA and shame about fire safety, because none of the reviews that this government is so keen to quote at us, whether it is at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, whether it is today or whether it is at any other point in time, has any actual reference where this model was supported by any of these reviews, because it was not.

They know they have to get through the legislation, so what do they do? They seek to bully the crossbench by putting in presumptive rights legislation. If you dare to vote against our dreadful, dreadful gutting of the CFA, we will make you vote against presumptive rights legislation. That is politicising cancer. That is low. That is as low as it gets. These people are beneath contempt. There is no gutter to which they will not crawl into to prosecute their unrelenting campaign to deliver control of fire services to Peter Marshall, to pay him off for the assistance he gave them prior to the election and for whatever it is he has on them. It must be something significant to do this at this point, because there is no evidence that this is the right way to go. It is clear that most of the volunteer brigades are not enthusiastic about this model and it is clear that most of the people who have been sacked and sidelined are not speaking out in favour of this model. This is just a model that the government and the union wants. That is all. To tie it to presumptive rights legislation is shameful.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) — Before I commence speaking about this matter of public importance today I advise the member for Ripon that I will also be in her electorate on Friday as I will be representing the Minister for Police at the Ararat Blue Ribbon Foundation ball. I look forward to — as I always do on trips to Ripon — meeting with the very many people there who are somewhat dissatisfied with their representation in this house at this time. I look forward to the people of Ripon being better represented come 2018.

I do commend the Deputy Premier for bringing this very important matter of public importance to this house. In this place we hear a lot from those on the other side about respect for firefighters. It seems to be one of their favourite topics, but I wanted to take this opportunity to talk to you about what respect really means. Respect for our firefighters — what does it look like? It looks like swift action on Fiskville so that our firefighters, paid and volunteer, are not exposed to toxic chemicals that cause cancer. This is about taking swift action and closing down Fiskville. Respect is about introducing presumptive rights for firefighters with the 10 cancers that we know are caused by exposure to chemicals that firefighters are commonly exposed to. We are very proud to be bringing this legislation to the house.

I do take the opportunity to note that the member for Euroa, as is her wont, made some pathetic quip today on Twitter:

Daniel Andrews promised to implement presumptive legislation within 100 days. 909 days later ...

I say to the member for Euroa and all of those on the other side that you had four years. You had 1460 days,

and what did you do? I will tell you what you did: your then minister, the person who purported to represent the interests of emergency services workers, the now member for Rowville, said this:

We are not convinced there is a direct link between cancer and firefighters.

So I say to the member for Ripon: talk about making politics out of cancer. You need to take a good look at yourselves and the behaviour of the former Minister for Police and Emergency Services when you were in power. You need to look at the assessments that he made and the great hurt that he caused firefighters by his failure to recognise this proven link between cancers and toxic chemicals that our firefighters are exposed to. So that is what respect looks like. Respect is about introducing legislation into this place in this term of government to give justice once and for all to our firefighters.

I want to commend my friend the member for Frankston on his extraordinary contribution to this debate today. The member for Frankston reminds us of what it is like to have been a firefighter and to live, as he says, with a potential time bomb and have to undertake blood tests on a monthly basis to see whether or not he has fallen victim to exposure to cancer-causing chemicals. I pay tribute to the member for Frankston.

I also pay tribute to the member for Yan Yean. The member for Yan Yean is a passionate advocate for her communities. She is a passionate advocate for the people of Ripon. She is a passionate advocate also, I might say — always has been — for volunteers and for the Country Fire Authority (CFA). As we know, the member for Yan Yean was right there in the midst of that firestorm on Black Saturday. Her communities were directly impacted. I want to take this opportunity to commend the two brave firefighters on this side of the house. I feel personally for them for the way they have been insulted by the member for Gembrook, who has proven himself to be unworthy of holding the title of shadow Minister for Emergency Services. His actions in this place are nothing short of disgraceful. As I was saying, they like to talk about respect on that side of the house, but we see nothing but contempt from them.

Respect of course is shown in many small ways as well. I am very proud as a member of this place to represent 38 volunteer fire brigades in Macedon and three State Emergency Services (SES) units — all fantastic outfits with people that are passionate about participating in their community and protecting their community. It is always my pleasure, in the many small ways that I can, to support them — be that attending and participating in

the awarding of medals, tanker handovers, fundraisers, Christmas parties and so on.

But let me tell you a little bit more about respect. In October 2015, as we know, my community was impacted directly by the Lancefield fire. I will tell you this: the Premier, on many occasions after that fire, joined me in Lancefield — without an entourage, and no media were in tow — to meet with all of our volunteers and our paid emergency services workers who were there throughout that period — be they members of the CFA, SES, Red Cross, the chaplaincy program, the Department of Health and Human Services or the local council. The Premier was there showing his support, and the support of this government, for all the fantastic work that our community did in, firstly, fighting that fire and then looking after the community in the long, slow process of recovery. That is what respect looks like.

The member for Gembrook has demonstrated by his actions, as I have said, that he has no respect for our firefighters and as such it is untenable for him to continue as the shadow Minister for Emergency Services. This is self-evident.

We all know, of course, that the member for Gembrook posted about his ‘error’ on Facebook, but I say, ‘Not good enough, Brad’. I was here in the house when the member for Gembrook was seeking — unsuccessfully, I might add — to goad the Minister for Emergency Services. I heard what you had to say on that day, member for Gembrook, and they were lies. This is what firefighters have had to say in response to the member for Gembrook on his Facebook page. Adam Shearer is a man —

Mr Edbrooke — I know him well.

Ms THOMAS — I do not know him, but I am pleased to hear that the member for Frankston does know him. This is what Adam Shearer had to say in response to the member for Gembrook’s apology:

No apology could excuse the comments you made in the public forum that is the Victorian Parliament. Many career and volunteer firefighters are still living the Black Saturday fires through their PTSD and you have just brought it back to the raw surface through your intentionally deceitful comment. Career and volunteer firefighters were out at the Black Saturday fires as soon as was possible, just like they are at every fire. Your comment, no matter what fire you are talking about, creates the illusion that career firefighters for some reason didn’t respond for 5 hours. Are you questioning their commitment, bravery, professionalism, or work ethic? You are not, and never will be, anywhere near the quality of person that these firefighters displayed on that day, and every day since. Your ex brothers and sisters in the Victorian police force must be very ashamed to have associated with someone

who can make those comments. Forget about ever being the emergency services minister, as you will never understand the people you are trying to represent. Keep your apology, Mr Battin.

Acting Speaker, there is nothing more that I can say. You have got the words directly from one of our brave firefighters. The actions of those on that side of the house with regard to everything to do with the CFA have been nothing short of disgraceful. I say to them this: where is the money you stole from the Victorian people under the banner of 'Hands off the CFA'? You took that money; you stole it, just like your former branch secretary stole \$1 million from your —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! I call the member for Bass.

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) — Thank you, Acting Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this matter of public importance in front of a packed chamber here on a Wednesday afternoon — a very exciting place to be! The matter of public importance is significant for a couple of points. The first part is that this house:

acknowledges the critical contribution of all firefighters — career and volunteer — as our population and environment change ...

Well, that has certainly got bipartisan support, and there are no bigger or better supporters of volunteer firefighters than this coalition. We have been supporting them from day one and will continue to support them.

The second part of the matter of public importance — one of the more frivolous and ridiculous matters of public importance that I have seen here in the 58th Parliament for a couple of reasons — is no doubt based on a comment made by the shadow Minister for Emergency Services here a couple of weeks ago, which has been corrected and apologised for. That should be the end of the matter, but of course the Minister for Emergency Services — the Deputy Premier, no less — is struggling for things to say. He is struggling to find any importance out there in the community, so he has come up with this notion that the shadow minister should be sacked.

Well, I can tell you a couple of things that have happened in this place in my two and a half years here when similar or worse instances than that of the shadow minister occurred. If there is anyone whose sacking should be called for, it is firstly the Minister for Emergency Services and Deputy Premier. Obviously calling the protective services officers (PSOs) 'plastic police' is a harsh criticism of our wonderful protective services officers and an absolute insult to every single

one of them. If anybody should be sacked, it is the Deputy Premier for struggling for relevance in the state of Victoria. But there was no apology for that — of course not. He is too big a man and too shameless to ever apologise to this state of Victoria for making a ridiculous statement and insulting every single one of those PSOs, with the wonderful work they do in the state of Victoria and in particular the seat of Bass, where they provide safe passage for our youth at the railway stations of Cardinia Road and Pakenham, and I thank them for that.

There are other instances where this Deputy Premier has shown himself to be unfit to be a member of Parliament and certainly Deputy Premier. One is his claim in the campaign prior to the last election that every single public school in Victoria will be asbestos free. Here we are, two and a half years into the government's term, and I can state that every single one of my schools in Bass that had asbestos prior to the election has still got asbestos. If he is true to form — and we know he will be — it will not be removed. Only last week at a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) hearing he retracted that commitment and said there will not be the full removal of asbestos in Victorian schools, so he has misled PAEC and he has misled the state of Victoria, true to form.

The thing about the Deputy Premier is that while he can beat his chest as much as he likes — he can huff and puff and try to blow the house down — he has got no credibility, he does not have the substance and he certainly has not got the commitment that others have shown in this place. He is falling very much short. We know that his words are meaningless, and the public know that they are meaningless. He can go out to every fire station in Victoria and claim that this legislation will not affect the volunteers, but none of them believe him at all, and he is making a complete fool of himself.

It goes on and on. It is not only that that the Deputy Premier claimed; he also claimed that within 100 days of the start of this Parliament, the 58th Parliament, presumptive rights legislation would be introduced. Well, we have not seen that either. Then the government links it to the legislation about splitting the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and disadvantaging every volunteer across Victoria. They have not got the courage to bring it in on its own. I do not know why it has taken so long. They lack courage, they lack conviction and they lack commitment, so they have hidden it in another piece of legislation just so that it goes through. Nobody is hearing and nobody is listening. It has taken longer than 100 days. Of course it would, because every single commitment from this government has not been upheld, and we continue to

see them fail the state of Victoria and fail it badly. Not only is the Deputy Premier failing the state of Victoria, he is not man enough to correct his mistakes. He is not man enough to correct his dishonesty in this Parliament and his continual misleading of the state of Victoria.

But it goes right to the top, right to the head of the snake. It is the Premier himself that is letting Victoria down and continuing to mislead this Parliament with his bullying tactics. He continues to do it. He bullied the former Minister for Emergency Services out of a job. He bullied the CFA board out of their positions. He bullied Lucinda Nolan. Well, I can tell you he is not going to bully this opposition because we can see that a mile away. We can see a bully a mile away. He cannot hide. What he does is try to hide behind his rorting members, the member for Melton and the member for Tarneit.

Ms Thomas — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the matter of public importance is quite clear. It is about the critical contribution of our firefighters, and it is about the lies that have been told by the member for Gembrook in this place and the failure of the member for Gembrook to apologise in this place. I would ask that you call the member back to the matter of public importance.

Ms Victoria — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this is totally relevant. MPIs are wideranging, and I suggest you rule the point of order out of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! I thank members for their advice. Can I say that it has been rather wideranging. I have been listening to the member for Bass, and I believe he is in order this time. I will ask him to continue his contribution on the MPI.

Mr PAYNTER — Acting Speaker, can I have my 2 minutes back please? I would like to get through this because there is a very important article in this week's local paper, and it goes back to the officer-in-charge of the Pakenham CFA.

If it is not enough for us to stand up and dispute what the Deputy Premier is saying, here is the officer in charge of Pakenham CFA, Mr Jim Dore. He is a wonderful character with a long service as a volunteer firefighter in the CFA. He says that volunteers at the integrated station have no clear idea of their future, and their reaction is not good. According to Mr Dore, the officer in charge of Pakenham CFA:

... the volunteers at Pakenham are concerned that having two separate organisations working together will lead to conflicts when firefighters are called out to incidents.

These are very damning allegations, and not a good sign for the Deputy Premier. But it gets even worse for the Deputy Premier, who attempted to visit the station in my patch last Sunday. He did not ask for an invitation. He did not even give me the courtesy of letting me know that he was going to arrive. No doubt he was sitting up there proudly in one of the fire engines and pretending he was the new captain. He probably had his hard hat on, trying to be the big man that we know he is not. He cannot fool the volunteers at the Pakenham CFA, and he certainly cannot fool a young man that grew up in the streets of Pakenham — proudly so with his family — or the hardworking volunteers and the hardworking newsagents of Pakenham.

But let us hear what the officer in charge of Pakenham said about the Deputy Premier trying to act like a big man sitting up on the fire engine. He said the Deputy Premier visited on 21 May, but:

A number of questions were asked about things that hadn't been worked out yet and there was no meat on the bones of the policy ... I believe the decisions have been made and this was a consultation on a decision that's already been made.

Well, there you go. That is straight from the Pakenham volunteers of the CFA. No doubt they are echoing the words of 57 000 CFA volunteers across our great state who have been serving our great CFA for many years. In fact, the CFA is a volunteer organisation that has been fighting our fires and keeping our communities safe for over 100 years.

This Deputy Premier is an absolute disgrace. He is incompetent. He is the one who should resign for misleading this Parliament over the last two and half years. He needs to make an apology, not only to this Parliament but to the entire state of Victoria for the absolute nonsense that he keeps going on with. If he was man enough, he would apologise for being in this place. He would apologise to volunteers at the CFA stations in Bass, including Pakenham, Koo Wee Rup, Bayles, Lang Lang, Kernot, Grantville, Corinella, Glen Alvie, Bass, Phillip Island, San Remo, Kilcunda, Dalyston and Wonthaggi. I thank them for their service every single day as volunteers of our great CFA organisation, which needs to be protected against this government that is hell-bent on bringing it down.

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) — I also rise to speak on and wholeheartedly support this matter of public importance (MPI) submitted by the member for Monbulk. This house acknowledges the critical contribution of all firefighters — career and volunteer, volunteer and career — as our population and environment change. It condemns the opposition leader

and the shadow Minister for Emergency Services for misleading Victorians in an attempt to divide firefighters who saved lives during Australia's worst ever bushfire. In speaking on this MPI, I think there has been wholehearted and widespread condemnation of the shadow Minister for Emergency Services for the terrible, divisive and nasty actions where he has tried to split —

Mr Walsh interjected.

Ms HALFPENNY — Well, he would never be a minister, I am positive of that, and we condemn his behaviour and the actions he has taken to divide firefighters in this state.

We know that in critical times and tragic times we can rely on firefighters in this state. They do work together. They do it for the good of the community. They work in a selfless way, sacrificing their own safety to keep us safe. I do not believe that any action taken by this pathetic shadow minister will in any way be able to defeat that or be able to divide firefighters, whether they are volunteer or career, because they will continue to do their job. They will continue to work for the good of the community, and they will not be sucked in by a political opportunist such as the member for Gembrook, the shadow Minister for Emergency Services.

I guess my particular interest in this is of course supporting emergency service workers but also as the chairperson of the inquiry that investigated the terrible tragedy of Fiskville, which was the Country Fire Authority (CFA) training centre that was contaminated with some of the most dangerous and toxic chemicals such as arsenic, benzene, PFOS and PFOA. Those are chemicals that are considered to be dangerous to human beings for many, many years. In fact they are the basis of a lot of the presumptive rights legislation that has been discussed for many years but had not been introduced into this Parliament until a Labor government made an election promise to protect firefighters who come into contact with these chemicals during the course of fighting fires. Firefighters would not have expected to have contact with such chemicals during training, which of course is an avoidable contact with these terrible chemicals, but firefighters were exposed because of the negligence of the CFA management and the CFA board.

I turn to the make-up of the CFA board. We interviewed representatives of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), which nominates four representatives on the CFA board. When we were talking to them during the inquiry they seemed to indicate that they really have no connection with the board when in actual fact they have four

representatives on that board. The VFBV must also take blame for the terrible catastrophe and scandal which was the Fiskville training centre. Obviously their representatives would be reporting to them, and they must have had knowledge of what was going on at Fiskville.

In fact one of the representatives of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria was also a board member of the health service that ran the Bacchus Marsh hospital. Of course that board was sacked for negligence and incompetence after another terrible tragedy where all those babies died due to actions that were considered to have been avoidable.

When we are looking at the complaints and the carry-on from the volunteer brigade representatives and those of the opposition, they really are hollow cries that are only political, are only being made to scare, distress, worry and stress volunteer firefighters for political gain rather than stemming from a genuine interest in the welfare and the wellbeing of the volunteers or anyone that works within the CFA and works in terms of fighting fires and keeping us safe.

In terms of the matter of public importance that has been submitted by the member for Monbulk, this is an important matter of public importance, and the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Gembrook, should be condemned absolutely and called out for what he has done. He is an opportunistic, selfish, grandstanding politician who epitomises all the things that politicians should not be. Unfortunately he epitomises how many members of the public view politicians because of the actions of people like him. I condemn his actions and call on the opposition leader to sack him from the shadow ministry. He has no right to be there and he does not deserve to be there. How can he possibly in any way represent or work with emergency services when he has vilified and attacked many of those who would come under his portfolio?

In talking about the matter of public importance, the shadow Minister for Emergency Services should resign. If he does not, he should be sacked by the opposition leader.

STATE TAXATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL 2017

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) — I rise to make a contribution on the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017. I note with interest that the member for

Thomastown was talking about liars. Well, the biggest liar of all in this house when it comes to taxation is actually the Premier. On the eve of the 2014 election the now Premier stood on the front steps of Parliament House in a live cross to Peter Mitchell from Channel 7. Peter Mitchell asked the then opposition leader, now Premier:

Daniel Andrews ... do you promise Victorians ...

if elected as Premier —

that you will not increase taxes or introduce any new taxes?

And the now Premier looked at everyone — looked all Victorians in the eye down the camera — and said:

I make that promise, Peter ...

I suppose what we see with the bill before the house at the moment is a series of broken promises from the Premier of Victoria. If you actually look at the tax take since the Premier became Premier, Victorians are paying something like \$4 billion more in taxation than they were when the Andrews government came into power. That is more than a 20 per cent increase in the tax take of this state.

As a lot of people are saying, we are paying more and getting less. If you live in country Victoria, it is particularly the case that you are paying more and you are getting less from the Andrews government, because we effectively have a Premier for Melbourne. We do not have a Premier for Victoria at all. He is just a Premier for Melbourne and this is a government for Melbourne if you live in country Victoria.

Let us look at the history of those increased taxes, including the increase in the coal royalty. A \$250 million increase in the coal royalty has been one of the contributors to the energy crisis that we have here in Victoria and the very real pressure our businesses here in Victoria that use energy, particularly in our food processing sector, are under with increased power prices. As I have said in this house on a number of occasions now, I have got a dairy food processor in my area who has had a 50 per cent increase in the energy component of their power bill — a 50 per cent increase! They are both a domestic supplier of milk and an exporter of fresh milk. It is a company that is very, very innovative and doing bulk exports of fresh milk to Malaysia. They have to compete on the international market, and they are saddled with a 50 per cent increase in the energy component of their power bill directly as a result of Andrews government policy.

It is equally the case with gas prices and the availability of gas. We are going to see a lot of businesses having a

really serious look at whether they continue to operate in Victoria because of the policy decisions by this government around energy pricing and energy availability. That just goes back to that broken promise by the Premier of this state that he would not increase taxes or introduce new taxes.

Those same costs equally apply to household bills. We are now seeing more people in default on their energy bills than we have ever seen before, because people are just really struggling to pay their power bills in this state, and it is placing a real cost of living pressure on those people as they try to meet the costs of their energy.

If you go to some of the specifics of the new taxes or the taxes that have been increased in this particular bill, one of the very insidious increases is the increase in the duty on new and near-new motor vehicles, which is in clause 46 of the bill. We have seen an increase from \$6.40 per \$200 to \$8.40 per \$200 in the cost of buying a motor vehicle. This is something that has been violently opposed by the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce and the Australian Automobile Dealers Association, because it is anti-jobs in this state.

If you look at this from a country person's point of view, country people do not have access to public transport. Country people rely on motor vehicles to do all the things that they do. This will significantly increase the cost of buying a motor car. For businesses that are on the South Australian border or the New South Wales border, it actually puts our car dealers at a competitive disadvantage to the car dealers in the cross-border towns where people will actually cross into other states to buy vehicles where it will be cheaper because of these taxes. This is clearly a broken promise by the Premier, by the Andrews government. They are significantly increasing the cost of buying a motor vehicle.

Most of the approaches that have been made to me about this particular bill have been on the changes to property valuations and the fact that in future the valuer-general will be in charge of all local government valuations and the letting of tenders for those. I had a meeting with the Municipal Association of Victoria the other day. They are saying that this change in the valuation cycle and the way it is going to be done will cost local government somewhere between \$20 million and \$25 million per year. That money will go straight out of local government and will be money that they will not be able to spend on fixing roads or on delivering their services. That will go into the cost of running these property valuations annually rather than through the biennial system that exists at the moment.

I have also been approached by a number of valuers who do work for shire valuations. Their view of the world, if I could precis it, is that it is effectively anti-competitive and that it is actually creating a monopoly for the valuer-general in how valuations are done in this state in the future. Those businesses have spent quite a few years building up the intellectual property in their business, building up the platforms as to how they do those valuations and how they record that information for those valuations. That will be all for nought now, because the valuer-general will have his systems that they will have to comply with if they want to get any work on this into the future.

There is a very real and grave concern in local government about the costs that they will bear in having to do these valuations annually. While there is effectively very little benefit in it for local government, there is a huge benefit in it for the state government because it will be able to capture the increases in property values quicker. But it will also lead to some significant fluctuations by doing it annually instead of smoothing it over two years.

On this particular bill there is a history of broken promises, and all this bill does is reinforce those broken promises into the future. As I said, country Victorians are paying more and they are getting less out of the Andrews government, and nothing looks like changing in the future. As I was saying before in the debate on the matter of public importance about the Country Fire Authority issues, people are coming up to me in the street unsolicited and asking, 'How long is it until the next election? How can we get rid of this Andrews government?'. When I say to them, 'You've got to wait till the end of November next year to do it', they say, 'God, is it that long? We need to get a change quicker than that'. The public of Victoria, particularly country Victoria, are just over the Andrews government. They are sick and tired of being treated as second-class citizens. They are sick and tired, as with this bill, of paying more taxes and getting less into the future.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WALSH — In this state we have a Premier for Melbourne, and we have a government for Melbourne.

Mr McGuire interjected.

Mr WALSH — The member for Broadmeadows might want to interject and pooh-pooh that, but no-one out there believes anything different about this particular issue.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WALSH — There is no money. The state government is collecting \$4 billion more in taxation, and it is not spending any of that in country Victoria. I rest my case.

Mr McGuire interjected.

Mr WALSH — The member for Broadmeadows can bang on all he likes. The truth is that country Victorians are getting absolutely zilch out of this particular government — except for the fact that they are actually paying more taxes.

Ms KNIGHT (Wendouree) — I am very pleased to bring some civility back into this debate. This may shock the member for Essendon, but I do not usually find taxation bills interesting at all. In fact I find them quite boring.

Mr Pearson interjected.

Ms KNIGHT — I am sorry about that. But this bill does excite me a little bit because it covers a couple of things that have been really terrific budget announcements and have been absolutely wonderful for regional and country communities. The bill is of course about a range of things, but I want to talk particularly about the first home buyer grant and about payroll tax for regional businesses.

There are lots of stories in the media about how difficult it is to purchase a first home. I am really proud that the Andrews government is making real changes to help people into their first home, particularly if they are getting their first home in regional Victoria. This bill eliminates stamp duty for first home buyers on homes that cost up to \$600 000, and there are cuts to stamp duty on homes valued up to \$750 000. If you look at the median price of, for example, a three-bedroom home in a suburb of Ballarat, according to domain.com.au it is \$380 000, and in Wendouree it is \$242 000. That is great news for people who are looking to purchase their first home in Ballarat: no stamp duty for first home buyers of a median-priced three-bedroom home in the best city in regional Victoria.

But Ballarat is growing; people are moving to our beautiful city. According to an article recently on the *Courier's* website, Ballarat is growing faster than regional rivals. Ballarat's population grew by 20 per cent in the 10 years from 2006 to 2016, so people are making the choice to move to Ballarat, and with very good reason, because more than anywhere else in Victoria, Ballarat has the best of everything. Population growth like this cannot be accommodated in existing housing. This kind of population growth requires the construction of new homes. By doubling the first home

owner grant across regional Victoria to \$20 000, as provided for in this bill, we can expect to see this growth continue, which is great news for first home buyers and also fantastic for the domestic construction industry in Ballarat and across regional Victoria.

I just want to move on quickly to payroll tax. In a great budget announced by the Andrews government, businesses with at least 85 per cent of their employees in regional Victoria will pay the lowest level of payroll tax in Australia — not just in Victoria, but in Australia. That is such a great encouragement for business to expand and move to regional Victoria, and it will make a massive difference across our state.

In the Ballarat region our current unemployment rate is 3.9 per cent. This is a significant improvement on the higher levels of unemployment that we have seen over recent years. But there are still many people looking for work. It makes it much more attractive to employ people in our region by reducing payroll tax. That will help create the jobs and increase opportunity in Ballarat and across regional Victoria. This also supports private sector growth in regional Victoria and in Ballarat — for example, the Broo brewery has moved to our city, into the Ballarat West growth zone. That is a \$100 million investment that will bring 100 jobs to our city.

Of course the Andrews government's investments in Ballarat are creating jobs. There are investments like that in the Eureka Stadium, where they are employing people right now in construction, and that will provide a tourism boost to Ballarat when it is completed. There are also jobs at the Ballarat station precinct and at Civic Hall, where the Ballarat GovHub will be built. But a 25 per cent discount on payroll tax is good for every regional business that reaches the payroll tax threshold — every single one. It provides regional Victoria with a competitive advantage when businesses with substantial payrolls are looking for a location to base their operations. There is every reason for any businesses looking to expand to place Ballarat at the top of their list. I commend the Treasurer on these measures and commend the bill to the house.

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) — I am pleased to rise to make a contribution in relation to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017. I just wanted to make a few preliminary comments before I address the bill in detail, because I think it is important to set the context, particularly in relation to the recent state budget. This bill will be implementing a number of those changes that were announced. But it is important to note that in the recent budget there are record levels of taxes and charges for Victorians, and Victorians are paying more than ever before but getting less and less.

We can also see that, despite budgeting for surpluses, Victorians have received nothing in cost-of-living relief — just new and higher taxes and charges. The Labor government has introduced or increased 10 taxes since the election, and that is a clear broken promise from the Premier who promised that there would be no new or increased taxes. Obviously that leads to a total credibility problem.

It is interesting to note too that under the current government we have got a law and order crisis. It is interesting statistically to note that the only thing rising faster than the crime rate, which is up 20.2 per cent since the election, is the level of tax in Victoria, which is up by more than 22 per cent. It is a disgraceful situation where the things we do not want to be happening are happening under this Labor government. As I said, the introduction of the numerous new taxes and charges contradicts the promise that the Premier made to all Victorians on 28 November 2014. I have spoken about that, as have many other members in this place in recent weeks, and particularly about the fact that the Premier promised all Victorians that there would be no increased taxes or any new taxes introduced. But of course that has turned out to be an enormous lie.

We can see that the fundamental purpose of the bill is to amend the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007, the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Unclaimed Money Act 2008 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960. So, as I said, this will be implementing a number of the budget measures that were announced by the Treasurer recently. There are a number of areas of concern. I have touched on some of them, but basically there are more new and increased Labor taxes and more broken promises. Councils are very opposed to the changes to the valuation of land process. It will cost them jobs and lead to greater expenses, and I will talk about that shortly. The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce has come out very strongly and very clearly about its opposition to increasing stamp duty on new cars, for obvious reasons, and other members have discussed that as well. There is considerable concern amongst the property industry in relation to the abolition of off-the-plan stamp duty concessions for investors, and that is going to have a very perverse outcome in relation to housing supply in Victoria.

Just for the record I think it is important to identify and document the 10 new or increased taxes that the Premier has introduced: the energy tax on coal royalties; the taxi and Uber tax; the land tax surcharge for absentee owners; the stamp duty surcharge for

foreign buyers; the fire services property levy increase; the increase in the stamp duty on new motor vehicles; the new stamp duties on off-the-plan property purchases; the new stamp duties on property transfers between spouses; the new annual property valuations; and the vacant home tax. That puts them on the record again for the Premier, who prior to the election said categorically that there would be no increased or new taxes. That was just an absolute lie.

I want to touch on a couple of those that I just mentioned. Firstly, I refer to the abolition of the off-the-plan duty concessions for non-owner-occupiers. The government is seeking to abolish the off-the-plan stamp duty concession that currently operates for all except owner-occupiers, and it means that stamp duty will be assessed by an investor at the time of signing a contract. That is essentially going to be a tax increase for purchasers because they will not be able to get that concession. That is going to be a disincentive for developers. It is important to remember that they are the ones that are providing the new housing stock in Victoria. If there is going to be a disincentive for purchasers, that will flow through because particularly in many of the bigger projects there is an absolutely essential element for the developer to presell large proportions of the apartments before they can get the necessary finance to proceed with the whole project. By removing this incentive for people to invest in this way, the result will be lower demand, which, as I say, may lead to developers being unable to obtain the finance that is absolutely essential for them to get the project up and going. So rather than being a positive thing for housing, it is going to be a totally negative one.

I suppose my comments on this just reflect the lack of thought that has gone into this budget in many ways, because we are going to end up with a very perverse outcome for the community. Rather than helping to solve the problem of housing supply, this is going to add to the problem. Again, that is probably not surprising given that many of the Labor government's initiatives in Victoria do that. They add to the problem. They add to the tax burden overall, and they add to the problems in relation to supply and demand of properties in this way.

Another measure in this bill is the introduction of the new vacant residential land tax. Again, that is a tax that is going to apply to certain residential properties located in what the government terms inner and middle Melbourne, but it also includes municipalities such as Banyule and Manningham; I am not sure how they are necessarily inner or middle Melbourne. The tax will be 1 per cent of the property's capital improved value and will be levied on an annual basis, and it will be in

addition to any other land tax otherwise payable. So it is going to apply to all residential properties in the affected municipalities that are unoccupied for six months or more in a calendar year, with some limited exemptions.

Some of the issues here, as the member for Malvern, who led the debate from the opposition side eloquently outlined, are the practical challenges and issues that are going to be faced by home owners in relation to this, because who is going to determine whether a property is vacant? How is that going to be determined? What is the period of time? What records need to be kept? What is the time frame required — and so on? It is just going to lead to an absolute mess, and it is going to have some very perverse outcomes. We have heard that rural people, for example, might have a one-bedroom apartment or a two-bedroom apartment in Melbourne because they need to come down for medical appointments or children's commitments or other various activities. They will end up having to pay that tax for a property that they are legitimately using on an ongoing basis.

I have touched on the increased duty for near-new motor vehicles. Again that is going to be a total disincentive for new motor vehicles being sold here in Victoria, particularly if you are up in the border region. Why would you buy a vehicle from a Victorian dealer when you can buy it from a New South Wales dealer and get it 1 per cent cheaper?

The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce have come out very strongly condemning that particular initiative of the government contained in the budget. Again we can see a perverse outcome because it is going to discourage people from buying new motor vehicles. Rather, they will be driving older motor vehicles. As other members on this side have discussed at length, there is a direct linkage between older motor vehicles and motor vehicle accidents. Again this measure will have a perverse outcome.

Another matter contained in this bill is the abolition of stamp duty concessions for spouses transferring property between each other. Again that is going to end up with many perverse outcomes. One in particular, which has been noted, is it is going to be particularly problematic for women who come into a marital relationship without a property if they marry someone who has property and that person wants to transfer property to their spouse. There is going to be a disincentive for people to do that.

There are a range of other matters, but suffice to say this just reflects the problems that were contained in the

state budget — a budget which is taxing more and more Victorians at higher and higher levels, and a budget that will have perverse outcomes left, right and centre, and many of them are identified in this bill.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — This is legislation that sets a framework for the government's new taxation policy for the next 12 months. Governments need tax revenue to help fund essential government expenditure in the areas of education, health, public transport and many other services that governments provide, and all members in this house know that very well. With the ageing population, these costs, particularly in the health sector, are expected to rise substantially. It is silly of and unfair for the shadow minister to suggest that tax cuts should always be across the board. There are times when it is fair for the most wealthy to pay a little bit more tax than people on low incomes.

The social agenda driven by the taxation measures in this legislation is designed to look after the people who are struggling to buy their own home and to make it easier for the unemployed to find work by cutting payroll tax. First home buyers have to compete against investors. This has been made even more difficult by the Turnbull government's tax policies around negative gearing and capital gains tax, which favour investors over first home buyers. The measures introduced in this legislation will make buying a home in Victoria easier and make it harder for investors. This bill gives effect to vital elements of the government's Homes for Victorians strategy.

The bill will abolish stamp duty for first home buyers on homes up to \$600 000 in value and will provide stamp duty cuts on homes valued up to \$750 000. This is a generous scheme for first home buyers, since the latest September 2016 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that Melbourne's median house price is around \$610 000. The first home buyer median purchase value in Victoria is around \$400 000. It is estimated that around 25 000 first home buyers will benefit each year, including approximately 20 000 in metropolitan Victoria and the balance of 5000 in regional Victoria. With these stamp duty changes, a person purchasing a house with a value of \$300 000 will save \$5685, while savings on a \$700 000 house will be \$12 357. These are big savings for first home buyers.

On top of this, for those who want to live in regional Victoria and build their first home in the regions, the first home owner grant will be doubled to \$20 000 to make the process easier. In addition to this, to rebalance the housing market towards first home buyers, from 1 July 2017 the off-the-plan stamp duty concession will

only be available to homebuyers who intend to make the property their principal place of residence. Those who qualify for the first home buyer stamp duty concession will also qualify for the off-the-plan stamp duty concession. These taxation measures will provide owner-occupiers and genuine first home buyers with a competitive advantage over investors.

The bill also makes the necessary changes to introduce a vacant residential property tax to address the number of properties being left empty. Where a property has been left vacant for more than six months in a calendar year, the rate of 1 per cent will be charged on the property's capital improved value. This measure will encourage owners who unreasonably leave these properties vacant to make them available for either purchase or rent. This will put more idle stocks into the property and rental markets, addressing the issue of shortages in those markets.

The shadow minister's opposition means that those opposite do not care about the struggle first home buyers experience in purchasing a house or any measures to increase rental properties for those who cannot afford to take on a mortgage. The bill provides a number of exemptions from the vacant residential property tax. These include exemptions for holiday homes, city properties being occupied regularly for work purposes, where the residence is being renovated or rebuilt or where there has been a transfer of property.

While many states provide some form of duty relief for first home buyers, Victoria's regime will be the most comprehensive and widely available. By comparison, New South Wales maintains a duty exemption for first home buyers of new homes only. In New South Wales the stamp duty exemption threshold is \$550 000 and the concessional duty is between \$550 000 and \$650 000, despite house prices in Sydney being much higher than in Melbourne. These are great social initiatives triggered by the taxation measures I have outlined, which will put more young people into homes of their own. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — In contributing to the debate on this bill I want to speak particularly about the proposed new tax on vacant residential properties. It is a particularly pernicious tax. It is a tax designed to single out and implicitly demonise a particular group and try to fix on them problems that society faces that are largely the responsibility of the government rather than of any particular section of the community. Unfortunately that is a tendency amongst governments throughout history and in different parts of the world that has led to great turmoil, great upheaval, great injustice and great

unfairness. Regrettably we are seeing this with the proposed vacant property tax in this bill.

To suggest that any particular group in our society is responsible for hoarding property or for simply buying up properties in large numbers and leaving them idle, thereby contributing to a housing shortage, is something that has just not been borne out by any evidence or any compelling case. There may well be instances where people have bought up properties and are leaving them idle, but no case has been made that that is the source of the housing shortage and rising housing prices that we are seeing today. There is no justification for the sort of subliminal demonisation of particular groups, particularly groups who are not in mainstream Australian society, that is involved in bringing forward this proposal, nor is there any justification for the concomitant socialist politics of envy that have been lined up alongside it.

The prime reason for rising property prices and that housing affordability is diminished is simply that demand is exceeding supply. In large measure that is because of government policies, particularly policies of the current state government, that are impeding supply, and it is also due to the lack of long-term planning for the population and its distribution within Victoria that would achieve a better balance between demand and supply. It is those issues that ought to be focused on in public debate.

By all means, have a debate about population policy, which is a prime contributor to the demand side of things, and by all means have an informed and national view about appropriate targets and aspirations for aggregate growth. Certainly, as I have indicated, we need a policy at state level about where across our state people choose to live and what is within the control and influence of state government to affect that. That is certainly something that this side of politics has committed to doing and on which it has a population task force underway. Regrettably the government is not following that course. So by all means look at those aspects of demand but then also look at issues of supply.

Again what we need is a sensible, balanced and measured policy, not the piecemeal approach of the current government, which imposes burdens, restrictions, delays and taxes on outer-urban development and which collects from developers levies that sit idle in various funds, while at the same time the cost of new allotments in the outer suburbs is being driven up. We need a sensible, measured, stable, predictable planning regime for established suburbs that allows progressive change over time without trashing neighbourhood amenity in the way that the latest

changes to residential zones in the *Plan Melbourne: Refresh* seek to do.

All of those are things that a state government could and should be doing to effect and improve the supply of properties, but this government is not doing that. It is not using the available measures, it is not using good planning, it is not using strategy, it is not providing in a timely manner the infrastructure that is necessary. But yet, as I referred to at the outset, so often — as we have seen in the course of history with often terrible results — governments that have failed to deliver on their responsibilities have sought to demonise particular groups or particular sections of society, saying, ‘It’s all their fault; they are wicked people; they are selfish people, and we are going to deal with them accordingly’.

This notion that the government is going to be running the ruler over how people handle their properties and decide what is acceptable and what is unacceptable is something that if it becomes established as a principle, could well be taken far further by the current government. If the government is going to apply a test to certain people holding properties vacant when they should not, as an extension of that logic why should it not decide that it is a better judge than individuals of whether a property is being underutilised? Are they going to set up an inspectorate that is going to go around deciding that empty nesters who are couples living in four or five-bedroom homes are holding properties selfishly and should be subjected to a penal tax or forced out of their homes? Who is going to be the judge of who is consuming property in a way that somebody else decides is excessive? As I said, it is a socialist policy of envy; it is unfair, and it is counterproductive.

Indeed why stop at property? Why not look at Storage King and the various other repositories that have lots of people’s possessions in them that are under lock and key, lying idle? Are we going to have government-appointed inspectors looking around at what goods and chattels people have tucked away in storage or have locked up in cupboards that somebody in government thinks could be put to better use if they were freed up from lying idle?

That is the logical extension of the sort of rationale and mindset that underlie this vacant property tax. It is not based on good principles of taxation. It is intended to be divisive, it is intended to subliminally single out and demonise particular groups for something that is not their responsibility — people who are simply wanting to contribute their funds to the Australian economy and

engage, as in so many other transactions, in outcomes that are mutually beneficial.

We already have national policies about overseas investment, and within those policies we should be an open and welcoming country to overseas investment; we should not be constantly sending out the message to people that they are not wanted. We should set policies in the national interest, as the federal government has done. We should ensure those policies are properly enforced, as the current federal government is doing. The state government should not be demonising people in the way that this vacant property tax and the messaging around it are doing.

I also want to comment briefly on the huge increases in land tax that are occurring under the current government. I had a couple of constituents in my electorate come to see me in just the last few days pointing out the huge increase in their land tax bill — more than a 2.5-fold increase, from the high \$20 000s to the mid-\$80 000s in just one year. It is a huge hit of more than \$50 000 to their income. Like so many other people in their situation they have chosen to put the product of their life's work, their life savings, into some investment properties, and they are now finding that they are being hit.

Now by all means, as property values increase, you might expect a pro rata increase in tax, but not only is this government taking advantage of very fierce bracket creep, it is now trying to extract even more money even more rapidly through the annual valuation processes it is introducing in this bill. So this is a bill with some very bad measures indeed, and those measures should be strongly opposed.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) — I rise to make a contribution on this bill. It is a bill which amends numerous acts and brings in many changes. It amends the Duties Act 2000 in many ways, including in relation to off-the-plan purchases, first home buyer exemptions and concessions in relation to their principal place of residence. It is a significant change in that it will also abolish stamp duty for first home buyers on homes valued up to \$600 000 and it will provide stamp duty cuts on homes valued up to \$750 000. I understand it is estimated that this will benefit up to 25 000 people every year who are seeking to purchase their first home, and of course it does represent a significant benefit to rural communities where the price of a home is much more within the range of first home buyers.

In addition to this the bill will double the first home owners grant, to \$20 000, for people building a home in regional Victoria. From a regional point of view,

the bill introduces an exemption from insurance duty for agricultural products such as crops, certain farm machinery and the like, and it will help reduce some ongoing costs of farming operations as a result of that. Also a welcome change will be the bringing forward by 12 months of the previously announced payroll tax threshold increases and the reduction of the payroll tax rate for regional businesses to 3.5 per cent, which I understand should be the lowest payroll tax rate in Australia.

While these are measures which will help businesses in regional Victoria, I struggle to understand why we have a payroll tax at all. It seems to me that a tax which has the effect of making employers question whether they should employ more people or not because of the payroll threshold being reached is a real negative in terms of employment for people. Nevertheless, it is an amendment which I believe shows that things are heading in the right direction.

While there are many amendments in this bill, in the few minutes I have to make my contribution the one I would like to make a comment on, and the one which has caused me considerable concern and in relation to which people have made a number of representations to me, relates to the valuation of land for rating and tax purposes. The proposal seems to generally deliver little real value to the process or to the finances of the state, but brings about a situation where the government is effectively disrupting a sector that seems to be performing very well in terms of accuracy and efficiency. I am told that it is a model that is accepted as Australia's best practice, and other states are moving toward the Victorian model, not away from it.

In his second-reading speech the Treasurer stated:

... the Victorian government will centralise Victoria's valuation function with the Valuer-General Victoria and provide for valuations to be undertaken annually. This decision will enhance Victoria's valuation and rating system and improve the efficiency, robustness and cost-effectiveness of rating authority valuations in Victoria.

I question whether this will be the case. There are a number of issues which arise. Currently valuations of this nature for rating and taxation purposes are carried out biennially. I understand that there is a view among some local government organisations that there has been very limited consultation in relation to this particular change and there is a strong feeling that it may well adversely affect local government revenue. A lack of consultation will always create problems, and it makes it difficult for people to accept changes. There is a view that this change will also erode the independence of the valuer-general, and it risks creating

perceptions of Victoria's land tax system really lacking fairness and operating in an arm's length kind of way.

There seems to be no strong reason that I can see to centralise this valuation path into the valuer-general's office. Surely to make such a change there must be a very strong reason for doing so. It seems to me that across Victoria we have many very significant regional valuation firms that conduct work on behalf of local government, and they do it well. They are significant employers in our community, and many of them do a lot of other work besides valuing land for land tax and rating purposes, but that would be a very significant part of their operations and their income.

We rely on having valuers in regional areas for many other reasons. For instance, I was a family lawyer for many years, and in all marriage breakdown situations you need to engage the skill of good qualified valuers. They exist in regional areas at the moment because they have a broad base of work to do, which enables them to then do what may very often be considered to be quite minor work at fairly low fees by comparison with some of the bigger tasks they do. I see it as a risk that should this centralisation into the valuer-general's office occur, many of our regional firms may really be impacted and may struggle, and that could then leave a dearth of good qualified valuers across regional Victoria, a situation we presently have.

These people know our local communities; it is where they do business. They conduct the valuations biennially, and their local knowledge is extremely important to the work they do. I know of a local valuation agency that employs up to 20 people in a smaller regional town. I have seen regional businesses struggle to maintain their viability when faced with the prospect of major metropolitan or indeed global companies coming into their space, centralising business and disrupting local businesses, leading to significant job losses. Some have fought against this successfully, others not so. On that basis alone, why disrupt established private sector business models in regional areas when there is really no need for government to intervene at all?

Further blurring of the lines of the independence of the office of the valuer-general will help no-one. I understand, and this information has come to me from an experienced valuer, that the valuer-general's office has significant market credibility in all sorts of sensitive government property dealings, and that is due in large part to its independence. The New South Wales government has recently conducted an inquiry into the operations of the New South Wales office of the valuer-general, and many of their conclusions touched on

this aspect; something which is deficient in New South Wales. It is concerning for all the reasons I have stated.

I want to say something about the vacancy tax. To me it was always intended that this would be a tax that would deal with the notion that there are many properties in Victoria that are owned by overseas owners. They are not occupied at all. They are sitting vacant. There are vacant apartments in the Docklands and other places. I may be wrong on that, but if that is the case, then there are other ways of tackling a problem such as this. Certainly a register of foreign owners of land would go some way towards that, as indeed would, for many reasons, a register of foreign ownership of water in this state.

It is always disappointing when you are faced with a bill that does some really good things that are welcomed by the community and others which are of concern and where there seems to be a lack of clarity and understanding of how amendments might roll out on the ground. I will be continuing to talk with government in relation to the removal of this part of the bill — that is, the valuer-general provisions — because I think they are unnecessary and could have very significant and long-term damaging effects, particularly in regional areas. There is a need for more consultation. We need to be able to maintain a very high level of confidence in our valuation processes across this state, and we should be able to expect that of government. I will be supporting this bill, but it will be with considerable reservations and with the intention of further negotiations with the government on these issues.

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) — I rise to make a contribution to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017. I think it is better known as the Andrews government's Broken Promises Bill, because when we talk about the increase in taxes in this bill it is quite concerning. We all remember when the then opposition leader stared down the barrel of a camera in answering a question from Peter Mitchell about whether he would introduce new taxes or increase taxes and said, 'I make that promise to every Victorian'. It is quite disappointing that this bill comes to us today with increased taxes. As the shadow Treasurer said earlier in his contribution, this has happened 11 times, so it is not just a one-off; it is not just an accident. Clearly I think the reason the government needs to increase taxes is more to do with incompetence.

The bill should have been split up so debate could have been directed more specifically at individual issues. Again we see the government rolling out the good, the bad and the ugly all in the one bill rather than each issue being evaluated on its merits. The reasoned

amendment presented by the shadow Treasurer should be agreed to rather than dealing with the grubby mixed bag of issues that muddy the clarity of this bill.

In terms of some of these new taxes, the abolition of the off-the-plan stamp duty concessions is a real concern. With the further squeezing of the housing market and the shortage that exists today in Melbourne it is important that we do not do anything or create any policy or taxes that will reduce the opportunity for investors, mums and dads, first-time buyers or whoever to buy off the plan because the stamp duty concessions are quite reasonable and considerable. It is quite attractive particularly to young first-time buyers. The lies and deceit that claim that this will fund the first home owners grant are quite concerning.

Then there is the vacant residential land tax, another new tax to be applied to residential properties in what are deemed as inner and middle Melbourne. It also concerns the cities of Banyule and Manningham. It concerns me that this government thinks that it can tell people what they can and cannot do with their own properties. What gall they have in saying that they can tell people what they can and cannot do, and, 'We'll put you on a different tax rate if you don't do certain things with your property'.

Increasing duty for new and near-new motor vehicles is a real concern up in our region on the Murray River. Obviously the minute you impose greater taxes on a car dealership along the Murray River, he or she becomes less competitive with a car dealership across the river. Of course we do not want any excuses for people to be able to slip across the river and make a transaction in New South Wales and not have to pay the increases in taxes on new or near new motor vehicles. It is more the fact that they do this because they can buy newer, more modern and safer vehicles. I really am not sure that this thought bubble of a bill was thought through thoroughly enough to understand the impacts it could have on the community. By people putting off that investment a little longer it becomes a safety issue, and that is quite a concern.

Abolishing duty concessions for spouses transferring property between each other is another concern. This government talks about families and how important families are to the community, which we all know they are, but if they understood families they would also know that families pool their resources and their income and work together. So they will buy real estate together and obviously sometimes circumstances change for people as time goes on. I am not talking about marriages and split-ups; I am just talking about investments and investment decisions down the track. It

is always handy having that flexibility so a family can progress and increase their wealth by changing things in their investment portfolio. As their circumstances change, they might want to modify ownership or change ownership.

This government again wants to take a lick along the way — just a little lick every time a transaction takes place — whereas currently that is not the case. I am quite concerned that it will again reduce flexibility for people. It is a cost that will go to the government to make up for its incompetence. This is not about creating new taxes so we can do more things; this is about incompetence and covering it up. When the government are a prudent government, when they are careful with the taxpayers money, I think people understand. But when you have already ripped up \$1.2 billion, people start to think, 'Why am I giving more taxes to a government that wants to rip up \$1.2 billion?'. And then when we see the members for Melton and Tarneit rorting the system, and the lies, cheating Victorians of hundreds of thousands of dollars, people again ask, 'Why are you increasing taxes? Why are you taking the easiest road? Why are you taking the path of least resistance?', which is just taxing Victorians harder because they have no say in it.

The government taxes Victorians harder because of its incompetence, while a community like Wangaratta, with its special school that is well overdue, is waiting to get a start on its special school, but it does not happen. If taxes are increased and there is a genuine reason for it and it is good investment, I think people can understand, but when it is due to incompetence, that is a concern.

Perhaps the sneakiest tax, as I look at it, is the move to annual property valuations for land tax. Every Victorian who owns a property will be slugged. Instead of the biennial system we currently have we will be moving to an annual revaluation. As we know, for the last 20 years we have had a rising property market, so there is a fair chance that an annual revaluation will increase taxes and property owners will pay more.

Those tax increases will hurt and they will hurt particularly those who live in struggling communities like, for example, Heyfield in Gippsland, where people are losing their jobs for a political decision — a decision by this government to reach out and assist the Greens. Ask those people how they are going to pay for the increase in their taxes on their property when they do not even know how they are going to pay their mortgage at this stage. This is just putting a whole new increase in tax and concerns on these people who have lost their jobs, just like at Hazelwood and the redundant workers there with the flow-on effects for them and

other businesses due to this mismanagement. And again there are those at Carter Holt Harvey in Gippsland whose jobs are gone. Their future is bleak and their job prospects are very poor. Has the government been there to tell them that they are going to be paying more in land taxes as well?

What is Labor's answer? Their answer was to go down to the Latrobe Valley and suggest they would give them a new pool and an upgrade to some recreation reserves and an investment in tennis. I think somebody needs to tell the Premier and the Deputy Premier, while they are busy canoodling with Peter Marshall and licking the boots of the United Firefighters Union, that the Latrobe Valley needs jobs, not a new pool. Of course a new pool is always useful in a community, but they want something that will pay the mortgage. An upgrade to the sporting precinct is not going to put food on the table. They want jobs. Jobs are the number one, two and three issues in those regions. This government has certainly turned its back on the Latrobe Valley and much of regional Victoria, and now we have these new taxes to make up for their incompetence.

We have seen that they have broken their promise 11 times already, and we are only just over halfway through this term, so we can expect many more broken promises to come, no doubt. Again that is to make up for the Andrews government's mismanagement. The land tax slug has already increased by 35 per cent — \$615 million. Certainly with their incompetence they are going to need more. This government will certainly not have any credibility in terms of going to the people and talking to them about increasing taxes while they continue to let the member for Melton sit in this place. Until he pays the money back, their credibility is absolutely zero. Again I say they would rather take the easy path, the path of least resistance, and go down that path.

I will not go through the reasoned amendment that the shadow Treasurer has put entirely, but I will say that its points include that this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the Labor Andrews government fulfils three points, and they are: fully consulting with local councils; fully consulting with road safety experts, and that is regarding motor vehicle retailers and the taxes on new and near-new motor vehicles; and certainly fully consulting with all Victorians affected by the proposed new and increased taxes on transfers of property between spouses and those other two that I spoke about. Again this reasoned amendment should be considered. There is no doubt about this government. They need to consider this reasoned amendment because it is a far more common-sense approach rather

than just covering up the incompetence of this government by putting up taxes.

Ms HENNESSY (Minister for Health) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Mr M. O'BRIEN (Malvern) — The opposition opposes adjourning this debate. It is typical of Labor to try to sneak through a multi-million-dollar tax increase and gag debate by the opposition. This is a 93-page bill, and the government is not prepared to allow more than a handful of opposition members to have their say on it. This is outrageous. We need to have more time to debate the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017 because of the depth of it, the complexity of it and the fact that so many Victorians are going to be hit and hurt if this bill is to proceed in its current format.

I do not understand why the government is so keen on gagging debate on what is a critical bill that imposes higher tax burdens on Victorians.

It was the government's decision to work two days this week. We could have had a full, three-day sitting week. We could have had more time to debate not just this bill but the other bills on the government business program. But no, the good old 'work to rulers' over there only wanted to work two days this week, so we are not going to sit back and allow them to gag the opposition without a fight. Why did this bill have to be on the government business program for this week? We could have had debate on it this week and then held over the vote until the end of the next sitting week to provide all members the opportunity to discuss the bill.

I had 30 minutes as lead speaker and there were plenty of issues that I wanted to address but did not have time to address. I have got colleagues who wish to raise issues about the fact that the so-called regional payroll tax cuts will not hit many businesses at all in regional Victoria because of the way the government has defined who is eligible for them. These are very serious and very technical issues. They should be debated by this chamber and yet the government is seeking to gag the debate. I understand why the government is embarrassed by measures in this bill. I understand why the government is embarrassed by its continual breaking of the Premier's promise that he would not introduce new taxes and he would not increase taxes. But it is appalling to try and gag the opposition — pointing that out — through shutting down debate by adjourning it off as the Minister for Health has sought to do here.

There are too many important issues. Why should there not be more time allocated to discuss the situation of

women who, in entering into a marriage, are now giving some men an excuse not to transfer property into joint ownership because under this bill there will now be a stamp duty consequence for a husband or a wife transferring anything other than their principal place of residence to their partner or even joint ownership of it? This is a serious issue. The government talks a lot about gender equality, reducing family violence and supporting women, and here is a bill which, in the guise of trying to reduce tax minimisation, actually has completely the opposite effect. This is something which does need to be discussed, and that is why we do not support adjourning this debate at this time.

What about the issue of the \$400 million increase in taxes on new car purchases? The relationship between making new cars more expensive and increases in death and serious injury on the roads needs to be thoroughly debated by this chamber. It is not good enough to say that we can brush this off or sweep it under the carpet. The Transport Accident Commission, in its research, has very clearly drawn a direct correlation between the age of cars on the road and the incidence of death and serious injury. What the government is doing by imposing a massive new tax on new cars is making it harder for Victorians, particularly younger Victorians and particularly Victorians from lower income brackets, to upgrade to newer, safer cars. This is an important issue. It deserves to be thoroughly debated by this chamber, and yet the government is refusing to allow that to occur.

I would have thought that even Labor members would be wanting to debate some of the issues in this bill. Regional Labor members may well be wanting to trumpet the regional payroll tax cuts, but they might have questions for their own Treasurer about the way in which a regional business is defined. Is it true, for example, that a regional business can actually have all its employees living in Melbourne and sleeping in Melbourne, but if they travel a bit around Victoria, they can still be considered to be regional employees under the bill? I am pretty sure that would not be the intention of it, yet that is how it works. This is a bill that deserves much more debate, and that is why we oppose the motion to adjourn the debate.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) — It has been uncovered. The member for Malvern, in his own words, in 30 minutes could not get to the point. He could not get to the point. He needed more than 30 minutes to come up with a contention. What hope does anyone on that side have if the member for Malvern cannot come up with the points in 30 minutes?

Those opposite are low-altitude flyers. They cannot keep up with the legislative program. The cat is out of the bag: the rest of them on that side have not got ready for the next bill. They do not have their speaking notes ready, because if you are listening to that mob on that side, it is the same speaking notes over and over again — same stuff, same dot points. Let us move on as we have heard it all before. It is basically the member for Malvern's reply to the budget truncated into 10 minutes for everyone. We have got things to do in getting on with the important work of this house. We are not stopping for anyone and we have got to move on with that, so let us get on with the legislative program, let us move things along, and if those MPs on the other side are not ready for the next bill, that is their problem.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I support the member for Malvern in opposing this adjournment. I was in fact the next speaker from the opposition listed to speak on this particular bill, and I would have liked very much to speak on this particular bill, the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2017, which brings in some of the most substantial tax increases that this Parliament has seen in a very long time.

It is an absolute nonsense to say the member for Malvern was not able to present the case; he presented the case extremely well. I would advise the member for Mordialloc that this bill is 94 pages long. It contains a whole series of tax changes that I would have thought those opposite may wish to talk about, but more importantly for this side of the house it contains a substantial raft of tax increases. Now those in and of themselves would be bad, and this is why we do not approve of the truncating of the speakers' list and we want to debate this bill further.

It would be bad enough having a whole raft of tax increases before this house, but the tax increases have come before this house in direct defiance of a government election commitment. The now Premier promised, just immediately prior to the last election, that there would be no new taxes and no tax increases. This bill gives effect to some significant tax increases and changes. I have witnessed the government allow filibustering — hours and hours of debate on non-contentious bills where the opposition agrees with the government — but when it comes to this bill, where the opposition has moved a reasoned amendment asking for more consultation and has flagged some serious concerns, the government is now truncating debate. That is not in tune with a democratic society.

I think it is perfectly reasonable for there to be an allocation of time within this Parliament where bills that are contentious have a bit more time for debate.

Even in the last Parliament, which was a very difficult Parliament to manage, I often tried to accommodate the opposition, to allow greater debating time for bills that they wanted to talk about — that is, bills that they had significant reservations about. As has been expressed by the member for Malvern in his reasoned amendment, which I wanted to speak in support of as the next speaker on this side of the house, there are a number of concerns which we on this side of the house wanted to articulate.

We wanted to make some comments about the vacant residential land tax, because to my mind this is preposterous. This is the first time I have seen a government say, ‘This may well be your private property, but this is the way we want you to use your property, and if you don’t use your property our way, then we’re going to tax you’. That is a fundamental issue which we on this side of the house wanted to talk substantially about, but no, the government has decided it wants to truncate debate on this tax grab. The abolition of the off-the-plan stamp duty concession for investors has very, very significant ramifications for the supply of housing in the state of Victoria, and again the government does not want to even listen to some of the concerns raised by the opposition and is moving to truncate debate, yet that is a significant issue for the supply of housing in the state of Victoria. It is significant even though the government may not understand that we believe its state taxation bill will have a negative impact on what it is trying to do.

We wanted to discuss the impact of stamp duty on new cars. I thought the idea was to encourage people to buy new cars. Regarding one of the most curious examples of policy, I wanted to talk about the abolition of stamp duty concessions for the transfer of property between spouses. The government has now decided that, other than for the sole or principal place of residence, spouses are going to be overruled by the government as to what their commercial transactions may be — a stunning piece of policy change for this Parliament. Yet someone like me, who has been interested in these sorts of issues for many years, is not even allowed to make a comment on the possibility that one spouse might want to be a company director and change arrangements or whatever. I am also concerned about the annual valuation for land tax purposes, again a fundamental issue. This is nothing but a tax grab by the government. I am appalled that the government has moved to adjourn this and urge members — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Kilkenny) — Order! Thank you.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) — I think this is just a time-wasting episode for those opposite. We need to get on with the government’s agenda. The people of Victoria expect us to debate and pass legislation in this place. I know that we have a number of important bills to be debated, one being the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017, which I want to see debated in this house this afternoon, as do a lot of other people, particularly the people of Geelong.

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I rise to support the member for Malvern’s move to oppose the adjournment of debate on this important bill. Firstly, at the time when the government sought to adjourn debate, only five of the 18 members on the coalition side had spoken on what is a very important issue. In such circumstances, with bills that are of such importance, it is not unusual for the Chair to act to hear additional debate over such issues. However, in this particular case we have chosen to go down this path. I think this is a path where the government is endeavouring to avoid scrutiny of its budget and in particular these taxation changes. The budget motion still sits on the notice paper. There are still a very large number of members of this Parliament who are yet to make any contribution on the budget. What this government appears to be doing is crowding up the notice paper to justify not debating the budget. It is unacceptable to let the budget debate go on and on and on. Its relevance is lost, but the importance to our community is immense. It is a denial of their rights for this sort of behaviour to occur.

Similarly on this particular issue The Nationals have two speakers left on the list waiting to speak who want to raise issues over a number of things. One of them in particular I would have raised, and now will raise, is the issue of valuations. The Mildura Rural City Council have sent me a very strong response to the valuation changes, a response that they want added to this debate. It says it:

... will be compelled to pay contractors for services already provided by in-house valuers —

thus increasing the cost to ratepayers —

Our in-house valuers currently undertake valuations for developer contribution payments, financial reporting, building insurance purpose and leasing agreements. The in-house valuers also provide specialist property advice to a wide range of business units within ...

the Mildura Rural City Council, such as the airport corporation and economic development corporation. Mildura Rural City Council:

... is also concerned about losing the valuation database without any compensation for the loss. Council has made a significant investment ... over 15 years and has developed a valuable asset in the valuation database ...

something owned by ratepayers. Therefore they are entitled to some compensation for that loss. There will be a loss of local staff, which will affect the local community. They will also be faced with the cost of redundancies, which will cost ratepayers as well. Also we do know that redundancies are disruptive to local families. Mildura Rural City Council are also concerned that they will become a price taker and lose control over the cost of revaluations.

All of these issues are really, really important. This is a bill of significance, as talked about by the member for Malvern and the member for Brighton. There are also the issues that have arisen over the relationship between the business community and the in-house valuers at Mildura Rural City Council over the last 15 years, and that raises questions about whether contractors can establish that working relationship and understand the subtle differences that are ever so important across a complicated area like that of the Mildura Rural City Council.

Of course if they get it wrong, there will then be an expensive appeals process to sort it out. It has, according to the Mildura council's letter to me, all the makings of a disastrous mess. They are also concerned about junior valuers being used because of the cost constraints and making mistakes, which I have talked about.

Also, there is a matter this government does try to shy away from, and that is transparency. A centralised valuation authority and the combination of roles to manage contracts and audit valuations by the valuer-general would place the valuer-general in a compromised position. This is essentially a conflict of interest because an independent auditor and certifier of a valuation process would no longer exist.

This is a bill of substance. It needs long debate, and it should be debated at length for Victorians to understand this budget.

House divided on Ms Hennessy's motion:

Ayes, 45

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Allan, Ms | Knight, Ms |
| Andrews, Mr | Languiller, Mr |
| Blandthorn, Ms | Lim, Mr |
| Bull, Mr J. | McGuire, Mr |
| Carbines, Mr | Merlino, Mr |
| Couzens, Ms | Nardella, Mr |
| D'Ambrosio, Ms | Noonan, Mr |
| Dimopoulos, Mr | Pakula, Mr |
| Donnellan, Mr | Pallas, Mr |

Edbrooke, Mr
Edwards, Ms
Eren, Mr
Foley, Mr
Garrett, Ms
Graley, Ms
Green, Ms
Halfpenny, Ms
Hennessy, Ms
Hibbins, Mr
Howard, Mr
Hutchins, Ms
Kairouz, Ms
Kilkenny, Ms

Pearson, Mr
Perera, Mr
Richardson, Mr
Richardson, Ms
Scott, Mr
Spence, Ms
Staikos, Mr
Suleyman, Ms
Thomas, Ms
Thomson, Ms
Ward, Ms
Williams, Ms
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 37

Angus, Mr
Asher, Ms
Battin, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Britnell, Ms
Bull, Mr T.
Burgess, Mr
Clark, Mr
Crisp, Mr
Dixon, Mr
Gidley, Mr
Guy, Mr
Hodgett, Mr
Katos, Mr
Kealy, Ms
McCurdy, Mr
McLeish, Ms
Morris, Mr
Northe, Mr

O'Brien, Mr M.
Paynter, Mr
Pesutto, Mr
Riordan, Mr
Ryall, Ms
Ryan, Ms
Sheed, Ms
Smith, Mr R.
Smith, Mr T.
Southwick, Mr
Staley, Ms
Thompson, Mr
Tilley, Mr
Victoria, Ms
Wakeling, Mr
Walsh, Mr
Watt, Mr
Wells, Mr

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Debate adjourned until later this day.

CITY OF GREATER GEELONG AMENDMENT BILL 2017

Second reading

Debate resumed from 10 May; motion of Ms HUTCHINS (Minister for Local Government).

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to open the debate on the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017 and to put on behalf of the opposition our views on this particular bill. If this government has proved anything, it has proved that when it comes to letting the democratic process run its course in Geelong it is not very keen on the outcomes. The government has been prepared to set aside the democratically elected institution and to attempt to remodel democracy in a manner to suit its own partisan political ambitions, and this legislation certainly is no exception.

The bill before us is not seriously about meaningful civic reform. It is a bill about driving Labor's agenda

and a bill about driving the best possible outcome for Labor in their marginal Geelong seats. Indeed the house will recall on 12 April last year the Minister for Local Government brought in a bill to sack the council and sought to debate it forthwith. Indeed we were forced to debate it forthwith. We were forced through the use of a rather obscure parliamentary device, which I had not seen used before nor have I seen used since, in order to — —

Ms Hutchins — It could have been an Australian first.

Mr MORRIS — The minister interjects that it was an Australian first. I do not think it was an Australian first. I am pretty sure it had happened before, but it was certainly an obscure device that was used to force the debate.

Of course the government argued that even though they had been effectively sitting on their tails for 16 months — there had been 16 months of inaction — the house needed to act that afternoon effectively to sack the council. Indeed only 20 minutes before we sat that day did the government begin, belatedly, to brief the opposition. We got a bare outline; we got a 10-minute summary and a sighting of a draft bill. We did not actually see the bill; that was only to be revealed when it was brought on for debate.

The bill of course was the result of the report of the Commission of Inquiry into Greater Geelong City Council. We had the opportunity to flip through the report, but it was embargoed effectively to be released in conjunction with the debate. Eventually — I think it was about halfway through question time, from memory — we obtained a copy of that report, and we did manage to read it, but only just. Certainly we were not able to go through it as comprehensively as is desirable when the outcome of the report was to sack the council.

The government planned to sack the council until 2020, to put in its own hand-picked commissioners, and again for the sake of political advantage, not for the good of the people of Geelong. The opposition, as members will recall, opposed that proposal. We were prepared to support the suspension of democracy, but only until the necessary work was done, so we did not oppose the sacking and indeed ultimately supported it. However, we wanted the problems dealt with; we wanted them dealt with in a timely manner and a new council elected in a reasonable time frame.

Despite the government using its numbers in this place, the other place fortunately agreed with our view, and

the government was forced two days later, on Thursday afternoon, to agree to the changes. In line with the opposition's view at the time, a new council will hopefully be elected this October. Despite this setback, the government continues to pursue its own political agenda in terms of local government in Geelong and, in my view, continues to ignore the real interests of the citizens of Geelong and seeks to entrench its perceived political advantage in the Geelong area.

Did the council need to be sacked? Absolutely, no argument. We agreed at the time it needed to be sacked. The culture was toxic, and there were significant issues right across the organisation, but it was not a culture that was driven by the constitutional structure of the council. It was a culture that was born of the organisation itself, and it was rotten. It was a culture of bullying embedded in the administration. There was a litany of organisational failures, and I will go to some of those in a few minutes. Perhaps worst of all was the failure to provide a safe workplace, both in terms of the administrative staff and in terms of the operational staff, the outdoor staff.

I do want to refer to some of the matters raised in the commission of inquiry report. As members will recall, that commission was headed by Terry Moran, AC, and included Jude Munro, AO, and Frances O'Brien, SC. While I might have some differences of opinion with those people in terms of the best way to go about things, all three are distinguished Australians who have made their mark on the Victorian and national communities, so I do not fault their findings.

They marked the council hard. They set out eight pillars in a framework for good governance. They indicated that the council was performing poorly in terms of direction and leadership and culture and behaviour capability. They indicated that the council was performing adequately but not particularly well in terms of structure, systems and policies, in terms of decision-making, communications and community engagement, and risk and compliance. Indeed they only gave it a tick for matters of monitoring and review, which is not acceptable by anyone's standards. They concluded that the council administration was seriously depleted and required major organisational and cultural reform. They also noted that the council administration had failed to support the mayor and his predecessor through the lack of adequate advice and the lack of adequate administrative support, and as a consequence placing significant pressure on each of those two individuals in terms of their directly elected mayoral role.

They also talked about — and this was noted as being up until very recently, at the time of the report — a culture

within the council of not responding in a prompt fashion to staff complaints of bullying and harassment and a lack of an effective system for reporting and dealing with complaints and indeed a feeling of powerlessness amongst staff to seek help and to have confidence that, if they did lodge complaints, they would be dealt with in a fair, prompt and transparent manner.

They also noted that the restoration of good governance would not only require changes to electoral structures but a major organisational and cultural reform. They noted the lack of a robust long-term strategic plan, that there was a need for transformational reform for a change management program and that the administration had tolerated poor performance and underperformance that had become a major source of frustration for staff and, naturally, as a consequence was incredibly damaging to morale.

They also noted a couple of physical things, particularly the dispersal of government departments across several locations, no doubt a legacy of the amalgamation of a number of former municipalities in the early 1990s. They noted that that dispersal did not assist in terms of the development of a shared vision, shared values and shared purposes, and the need to consolidate to one central site. They are just a few of the actions in the recommendations that were made. The other one that is probably worth noting — and I will come back to it in a second — is the need for the 20-to-30-year outcome, focus vision and strategy for the council and for the city. I understand that that at least is being addressed.

The concern with this bill is that while it addresses the constitutional structure it really does not address any of the other significant problems that were identified in the report. I know that the minister in her media release of 9 May indicated that the administrators were engaged in the development of a new vision for the city, which I referred to a moment or so ago, and that they engaged with 13 000 locals, a bit over 5 per cent of the population of the city.

But there is no evidence that any of those other issues — the toxic culture and the problems in the workplace — have been addressed and certainly none of those issues are dealt with in terms of this legislation. Admittedly not many of them can be dealt with by legislation, but we have no update or indication of outcomes from the actions of the administrator. It would have been useful, I think, to put those things into context.

Anyway, the council was sacked following the passage of the legislation. The government then proceeded to set up the Geelong Citizens Jury. This part of the

process was unusual and also perhaps a first in Australia. I do not know. It was certainly a different way of doing business. I think 100 members were involved. I am sure they discharged their duties diligently for their \$100 a day, but I have to say that I am always a little nervous whenever a filter is placed between the general public — our constituents — and the decision-makers. No matter how well intentioned or how diligent they were or how vigorously the jury members discharged their task — and I have no reason to question any of those things, I have no doubt they did their best, as they saw it — there is nevertheless because of the structure a filter placed between the community and the ultimate decision-makers. I am not sure that that is a particularly helpful development in terms of our democracy.

The other interesting thing that comes out of this is that while the final report is dated January 2017, the minister issued a media release on 26 November 2016, indicating that:

The 100-member independent citizens jury met for the final time today —

being 26 November and that the government would:

now consider the jury's advice ...

whereas in fact it appears that they continued to meet and indeed only finalised the report in January 2017. I have not sat down and done a page-by-page comparison between the November 2016 and January 2017 reports, but they certainly appear to be rather similar. It would be useful to understand why the apparent discrepancy occurred.

In terms of the report itself, the jury has, I think wisely, talked about principles and about aspirational recommendations and practical recommendations, and the government has responded in those terms. The practical recommendations revolve around the constitution of the council, whether the mayor should be directly elected or not, and about the number of wards and the number of councillors. The aspirational recommendations relate to a range of other matters, many of which are the sorts of things that one would hope in an appropriately functioning municipality you would not need to highlight. But I think it was certainly worthwhile making the point again that there are standards and our community expects elected members, be they councillors or members of Parliament, to behave according to those standards.

There was, of course, one aspirational recommendation that the government ruled out. That related to a proposal to restrict a particular group in the community

from participating fully in the democratic process by over-contributing to campaigns. I do not think there would be any difference of opinion between this side and the government on that particular recommendation.

In terms of the specifics from the jury with regard to the decision-making process, there is quite an extensive narrative in terms of how they came to make the recommendation that the concept of the directly elected mayor should be withdrawn from Victoria's second city. They note that there was a close to 50-50 vote and note that:

... there was a significant group who were undecided unless further aspirational changes ...

could occur. On the following page, page 4 of the report, they note that:

Clarifying these options may have changed the results.

They also note that there are key advantages for a directly elected mayor, including 'Greater engagement from community in the voting process' and 'A greater mandate from the whole community to drive the agenda for Geelong'. But indeed the advantages as they have set them out for a directly elected mayor seem to me to be far more compelling than the advantages they have laid out in terms of a council-elected mayor.

They have also recommended, in terms of wards and councillors, a four-ward structure, basically three-plus-three-plus-three-plus-two. The three-plus-three-plus-three seems to me a reasonable proposition, given the physical layout of Geelong, the geography of Geelong and the manner in which development has occurred. So that was the jury. As I have mentioned, the government has responded and the consequence of the response is effectively the bill that we have before us.

In terms of the bill itself, clauses 1, 2, 3 and 11 are pretty standard, in terms of commencement, definition of the principal act, repeal on the first anniversary of operation, that sort of thing. To me the bill really is about repealing the mechanism that is currently in place in the principal act for the direct election of a mayor and substituting that with a process to elect a mayor from the council and some consequent amendments, plus a proposal to set the internal subdivisional ward structure via an order in council.

I was interested to read an opinion piece from the Committee for Geelong on 12 April 2017. Rebecca Casson noted, among other things, that the committee was among the first to present to the Geelong Citizens Jury. In her words:

We conveyed the message that now is not the time for Geelong to go back to councillors deciding behind closed doors who should be the mayor of our great city ...

Our community deserves a chance to elect a champion for Geelong ...

...

As Geelong grows, our city needs strong local government leadership. The committee believes that mayors directly elected by the people are given a mandate from the people, and can therefore claim to have greater legitimacy to lead in local government.

I think certainly those are sentiments that the opposition would agree with, so under standing orders I wish to advise the house that amendments to this bill have been prepared, and I request that they be circulated.

Opposition amendments circulated by Mr MORRIS (Mornington) under standing orders.

Mr MORRIS — While they are being circulated I might just proceed, given the time. The opposition's view is that a directly elected mayor should be retained. It is also our view that a directly elected deputy mayor should be added to the council. We do agree, as I indicated earlier, that the jury's view of 11 councillors being a reasonable number for this city is appropriate. Given that, we are proposing that the directly elected mayor be retained and that a deputy be added. With those two councillors, we believe that nine ward councillors is an appropriate number and that the municipality should be subdivided into three wards of three councillors each. But also, and I think importantly, we do believe that the boundary should be determined by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), and I will return to that in a minute.

It is clear, as I indicated, from the jury report that the existing model had strong support and that indeed, as it says, under some circumstances it would have been a majority view — in fact it was only because the modifications could not be dealt with that the majority of the jury did not support the existing model. I think it would be a gross overreach and not reflective of the jury's deliberations if a different outcome — the abolition of the directly elected mayor — were to become the outcome of this review. To deny the citizens of Victoria's second city the opportunity to directly elect their mayor I think would be a great pity.

When this process was begun back in 2011 the concept was untried. It was an untested process, and we had to construct a model that could start the process but then perhaps be refined as experience was obtained, because beyond the City of Melbourne, which of course has city-wide councillors elected, there was no experience in

terms of directly elected mayors. The concept, though, was strongly supported by the community and by the Committee for Geelong at the time, but there were some views there that perhaps did not lead to optimal operational structures, and certainly in terms of the consultation, which was extremely extensive, there was a very, very strong view presented to me — because I was the one conducting the consultation — that single-member wards should be retained. There was also very, very clear support for a directly elected mayor. As I think I said in the debate, there was almost no opposition, and that was the case. There was almost no opposition, and it came from a particular pocket associated with the office of the then member for Geelong.

Both those things were potentially in conflict, as I said, with the optimal model, so we came to the conclusion that we needed to construct a model that was consistent with the views of the community but that further modifications may be required in the light of experience. That was always the case, and that is why we flagged the intent and indeed proposed formally the conduct of a review in early 2015 ahead of the 2016 council elections. For reasons best known to herself the present Minister for Local Government did not conduct that review, and then when it was too late to modify the model in an appropriate manner, we found the council was in any case sacked. That review should have been undertaken. Had that review been undertaken I think it would have recommended appropriate adjustments to the mechanism, but instead we have a proposal from the government that effectively seeks to blame what were clearly administrative failures — and I detailed them extensively earlier in this contribution — and the toxic culture and use that as the basis to abandon this model entirely.

The other point I want to make is with regard to the Victorian Electoral Commission. The minister has indicated that the jury's views on the structure will be or have been transmitted to the VEC for consideration. That is fine. The problem I have with this bill is that rather than incorporate the whole of division 2 of part 10 of the Local Government Act 1989, which sets out the mechanism for review of ward boundaries, the only part that is proposed to be incorporated is section 220Q, which is the capacity for the minister by the device of an order in council to determine the structure effectively unilaterally or through those present at the executive council. There is no need to consult the VEC. We have been told that has been done, but there is no obligation to do so. Going forward, for future reviews there is no obligation to consult the VEC either, so the bill sets up a mechanism where there is no independent assessment of the merit of the internal boundaries. That, I think, is of great concern.

The opposition does not support the essential proposition put forward in this bill. We do not believe Victoria's second city should be deprived of the opportunity for every citizen to have a say in who their mayor is. We do believe that the initial model of a single mayor has not worked well and, as I have indicated, I had concerns at the time, but that was the way the committee wanted to go. We believe that the model could very well be strengthened, not only with additional administrative support as flagged by the inquiry, which is absolutely essential, but also by the addition of an elected citywide deputy mayor and by a breaking down of the individual wards that currently exist in the structure, and by tempering that breakdown so that there are still discrete geographical communities, because Geelong is still very much a collection of communities and that is where people feel their greatest connection.

We do see the abolition of a directly elected mayor as a direct threat to the opportunities that exist for Geelong. Equally, I am sure the government sees the existence of a directly elected mayor as a direct threat to their preferred political ascendancy in the city. Indeed we know that they will do anything they can to protect their political interests. In this bill, unfortunately, they are seeking to entrench their perceived political advantage, but I think there is an opportunity to fine-tune the current mechanism. There is an opportunity to come out of this review with a process that works and works well, one that works in the interests of the community but still allows the opportunity for the citizens of Victoria's second city to have a direct say in who leads their city forward.

Mr EREN (Minister for Tourism and Major Events) — I rise to speak on the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017. At the outset I congratulate the minister at the table, the Minister for Local Government, on coming up with such a balanced and democratic view of what should happen with the City of Greater Geelong going forward. Thank you very much for all the hard work you have put in, Minister.

Geelong, as the second-largest city in Victoria, is an extremely important city for us in terms of growing our economy. There is no question of that. As a Geelong member, and also as a minister, I understand the importance of having a functional council. The three tiers of government are required to work cohesively, in unison, to ensure an outcome that is good economically and socially for the wonderful residents of the City of Greater Geelong. From that perspective, I say to the previous speaker, the lead speaker for the opposition,

that we would not be in this position if they had got it right the first time.

We told them back in 2011 that the model they proposed was wrong. We told them that if you have a popularly elected mayor who has no power and a deputy mayor who has more power because they are elected from amongst the councillors, there is an immediate impact on the cohesion of local government. We said at the outset that they got it wrong, but they did not listen to us. They continued on with a bill that was less than sufficient for the second-largest city in Victoria, one of the most important cities to grow our economy. They left it dysfunctional. We would not be here debating this issue right now if the then government had got it right. If you had listened to us, you would have got it right. But you did not listen to us, and that is why we are standing here debating this bill. I want to make that very clear.

The second point I want to make is that as the second-largest city in Victoria we want to ensure that economically it is viable, that it is sustainable and that it grows. When you look at the dysfunction that occurred in that city in relation to the infighting — the member for South Barwon would know, as a former councillor — you need a council that works together to advance the causes of that city, not engage in infighting with a public stoush reported almost every day in the media and reports of what councillors were saying about the popularly elected mayor.

We were behind some of the smallest shires and councils across the state in terms of economic advancement. Economic growth was almost nil because there was no concerted effort by the council to work together to grow the economy. We were very frustrated as a state government because we know the importance of Geelong, and certainly we wanted to make sure that we worked cohesively, in unison, with a tier of government so we could grow the economy of Geelong.

We lost a very good man because of the inadequacy of the first bill that you provided to this house. Keith Fagg is a wonderful man — a great businessman. The philanthropic work that he does in Geelong is tremendous, and the contribution he makes to Geelong economically is fantastic. But because of the inadequate bill that you brought before the house we lost our popularly elected mayor midterm. That is why you got it wrong. You have got to admit that you got it wrong.

We then found ourselves in a position where there were some really serious allegations being made about bullying, and you cannot put your head in the sand when it comes to bullying. You have got to tackle it

head on. Some issues that came out of that council were absolutely atrocious. I am not saying it was only pertaining to that particular council at that time, but there was a culture of bullying going on in council. Therefore we had to act as a government. We could not ignore it; we had to act to tackle this issue.

We on this side are proud of our record of having the first ever Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence in the state and, having a royal commission into family violence, the only state in the nation to do that. Of course we are proud of our record when it comes to tackling these sorts of issues. We could not ignore the fact that there was bullying going on in that council in our second-largest city.

As a result of that, we had to have an inquiry. The culture review was conducted by Susan Halliday, and I am not sure whether the opposition thinks that Susan Halliday was not up to it. I think she was very good. She was very thorough. She went right through the place and uncovered some very nasty and terrible things in that council. Further, the EY Sweeney culture review quantitative report provided to council showed that 31 per cent of staff surveyed had witnessed bullying and 26 per cent had personally experienced bullying in the last 12 months. Susan Halliday said in her report that:

Based on information shared, a number of councillors were considered to have repeatedly engaged in tactics that people said amounted to bullying. Individual descriptors were used to identify such councillor conduct of concern, including people stating that they felt that they had experienced aggressive, belligerent, threatening, disempowering, sexist, dogged, bombastic, arrogant, rude, spiteful, frightening, demeaning, belittling, objectified, exploitative, calculated, humiliating and intimidating behaviour.

Have I missed anything? This is atrocious. It was a system that was obviously broken. Disturbingly, the commission of inquiry found that:

The mayor's bullying and abusive behaviours towards his staff have had significant adverse consequences for their health and wellbeing.

...

The mayor and councillors have demonstrated little collective commitment to implement necessary change following the Halliday culture review and no urgency to adopt the culture review stage 2 action plan for councillors.

The commission of inquiry also found that:

The mayor and a significant number of councillors have regularly intimidated, abused and sworn at staff, often in the presence of others, in the pursuit of their own interests. This has created a climate of fear and anxiety for many staff —

Mr Katos interjected.

Mr EREN — I will get to the member for South Barwon's interjection. This is the problem: it came from the top. If you are saying, 'Name one', it is coming from the top, from the mayor himself, and that I think is the worst part about it.

Quotes attributed to the mayor provided to the staff of the commission of inquiry, at page 23 of the report — obviously I cannot say the full words because they are extremely explicit — include:

Where the f..k were you? I needed you to take photos, the f..king Leader of the Opposition was in Geelong for the breakfast.

...

Are they f..king dumb ... Tell them to just give me some f..king logos ... tell them I don't want all this other f..k shit —

pardon me, 'shite' —

I just want some f..king logo ideas.

... F..k me, I'm the mayor, I don't need to be meeting with someone one week and then meeting with them the next.

This is terrible behaviour. Of course, as noted in the commission of inquiry report on page 45, 'the fish rots from the head'.

Mr Katos interjected.

Mr EREN — And the member for South Barwon agrees.

We have consulted widely. I can go through the list of people who have come up with this model. And if you want to go against the democratic rights of people, I point out we surveyed some 15 000 people and selected some 100 people out of that — —

Mr Katos interjected.

Mr EREN — Well, there were 100 people. That is part of the Geelong community, part of the demographics of Geelong. There was an online Vote Democracy Geelong survey with 935 responses and there were 30 detailed submissions. Facilitated discussion group sessions were held with key, targeted community groups across Greater Geelong including the Geelong Interfaith Network, Women in Local Democracy, Highton Seniors, the Geelong Multicultural Youth Network, the Wathaurung Co-operative, the Geelong Community Men's Shed, the Geelong Ethnic Communities Council, GASP Geelong and Headspace Youth Crew, VALID Peer Support Group for people with a disability and the Geelong

VIBE and environmental youth groups. There were four community workshops with 54 participants, a 'Geelong Conversation' event with 31 attendees, 1897 unique visits to the website and 2100 postcards handed out, 33 local media articles and four radio spots, and I can go on and on.

We clearly have demonstrated that this is a democratic process. This is the will of the people, and I urge the opposition to follow the will of the people.

Mr KATOS (South Barwon) — I rise this evening to speak on the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017. I might quote from *Hansard* the minister's comments when he was a member for Geelong Province in the Council:

I wish to raise an issue for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. The action I seek is for her department to investigate the possibility of the City of Greater Geelong residents directly electing their mayor.

But the bit in *Hansard* goes against what the minister wants, because he wants to go back to the councillors electing the mayor. This is what he said in that same adjournment debate:

People in Geelong are not happy with all the politicking that too often takes place every year leading up to the council electing a mayor. It can be very disruptive. In March this year the residents of Geelong saw firsthand how nasty it can get when the previous mayor did not want to hand over the baton to the current mayor, when clearly the councillors had decided it was time for a change. This obviously caused a lot of friction among the councillors, and Geelong cannot afford to have these types of disruptions. I therefore seek the assistance of the minister to look into this matter.

The now minister said at that time that this method that he now wants to go back to was not working because you had these backroom deals. I have been a councillor at Geelong and I have seen this stuff. I have seen the sorts of backroom deals that people attempt to make, and if you are not strong and do not stand up to some of the bullying tactics that you see with that, then you will get some pretty poor outcomes. That is exactly what the minister wants to go back to.

Let us look at the whole absurdity of this bill. Geelong is Victoria's second city and it should have a directly elected mayor. The whole absurdity of this bill is that in the government's response to the Geelong Citizens Jury, which I will touch on later, the Minister for Local Government basically says, on page 17 of that report, that there is nothing precluding them going back to a directly elected mayor and deputy mayor under the Melbourne model. This bill seeks to do away with the directly elected mayor, but then in the same breath the Minister for Local Government is saying, 'But in the

future we might go back to a directly elected mayor under the Melbourne model'. Why not just do that now?

The member for Mornington has put forward a very sensible amendment whereby a mayor and deputy mayor would be elected and then a three-by-three ward scenario — selected by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), mind you, not the citizens jury or someone in the minister's office working out the boundaries of our wards in Geelong. That would be done independently by the VEC rather than it being told what to do.

I must admit that when I was in the briefing from the department basically the answer to every question was, 'That is what the citizens jury recommended'. So everything has been based on the citizens jury and, as I have said all along, it is about putting a body between the decision and the government. But they were saying, 'Well, it is not our decision, it is a citizens jury's decision'. This government needs to make a decision. They are saying they are happy to go back to a directly elected mayor. So it is ridiculous to abolish the system and then say, 'Okay, but in future we will go back to it'. It just makes no sense.

The amendments proposed by the member for Mornington are very sensible. They propose a three-by-three ward structure. One thing that the member for Mornington did when he was a parliamentary secretary was consult. People in Geelong do like to have a local councillor. They do like to have that locality so they can say, for example, 'Yes, I live in Highton and my local councillor is X or Y'. Now at least under a multimember ward you have got three councillors and there is a degree of geography and locality to what those councillors do and represent. People like that, so that is why it is very sensible to go to the model proposed by the member for Mornington.

I will touch on the citizens jury. I am of the firm belief that the citizens jury was led in particular directions by this government. You cannot get a better indication of that than the vote about whether to have a directly elected mayor or not. The citizens jury was only allowed two options: the present system or going back to the old system where we had the councillors electing the mayor. Now there were many on the jury, and that is clearly stated in the interim report and the final report. I will read a quote from the interim report which was included word for word in the final report:

There was a significant group who were undecided unless further aspirational changes occurred for the directly elected mayor option.

So basically if we were allowed to go to a Melbourne model, then we would support the retention of a directly elected mayor. In the absence of that, these people went back and said, 'No, we will go to the old way'. But my aspiration is that we go to a Melbourne-style model. Now logically that should have been considered. There were three potential options, but only two were put on the table in the citizens jury process, which to me is outrageous. That is leading the jury. There were three policies and they were only allowed to pick from two of them, which I just find quite amazing.

It shows how this citizens jury was led. If that option had been on the table, we would have had a different outcome in the citizens jury. They would have said, 'Yes, let us keep the directly elected mayor', but of course that is not what this government wants. They have led the jury. It is simple.

The newDemocracy process that was engaged in was supposed to cost \$250 000, but a freedom of information document that has been obtained shows, and I quote:

The budget for the Geelong Citizens Jury still has not been confirmed through the DELWP internal budgeting process for 2016–17. A budget of approximately \$450 000 (not including staffing costs) has been sought through the process but is yet to be confirmed. Approximately half of this cost is specifically for the citizens jury. The community engagement stage was expected to cost — —

Guess what? It is redacted. Rather than \$250 000, the cost is almost \$500 000. That could have run the entire council election, which is quite amazing.

Then we had the Victorian Electoral Commission report. The VEC conducted an electoral review last year and handed down its report in March. That electoral review proposed 11 councillors, of which there are three each in three wards and two in one ward. They have three in Bellarine, three south of the river, three in central ward and two in the north. The VEC has just put out a new electoral structure for consultation, and it says basically, 'We're just putting up what the citizens jury wants. So whatever the citizens jury has recommended, that is what we are putting up'.

The second option the VEC has put up I would have to say would be the most ridiculous option I have ever seen in any form of redistribution or ward structure. There is a ward called the northern region ward, which includes the southern suburbs of Geelong, so parts of my electorate are in the same ward as the member for Lara's electorate. It is just ludicrous. You have Anakie and Armstrong Creek in the same council ward. That is just so absurd that any rational person during this

process is going to say, 'Guess what? We are going to go to option 1', which is the government's preferred option. It is the preferred option because the last VEC report, which was handed down last year, only had two councillors in the north.

As the member for Mornington said, this is political expediency. We are going to this model because we feel we can get a better advantage politically by going to three councillors in the north. We had an independent VEC process. Now that has all been thrown out of the window. Their own submission, their own preferred option, has totally disappeared because the government is getting what it wants. Any rational person is going to pick model 1 because model 2 is just so ridiculous that no-one could possibly pick it. Again it is the government leading the people here; that is what they are doing. They have always wanted to get rid of the directly elected mayor, and this has all been a smokescreen, all smoke and mirrors, to put a third party, being the citizens jury, between the decision and what they really want, instead of having the courage of their convictions to do what they stated. I will support the member for Mornington's proposed amendments.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017. I begin by thanking the minister and her team for the work they have put into this bill and for getting it to where it is today. I also want to record a huge thankyou to those 100 people on the citizens jury who have worked hard over the last 12 months or so, doing the hard yards, listening to various speakers at their forums and having debates about what they saw as being the best possible model for Geelong, as well as to all of those people who put submissions in and to the jury for taking note of those as well. An enormous amount of work was put in by those people. I had the opportunity to meet them on one occasion when I picked up the draft report. They were very committed to the work that they were charged to do, and they did it as members of the Geelong community who had a commitment to their community. They listened to what people were saying.

On the Geelong Citizens Jury's practical recommendations, we said we would listen to the Geelong committee, and that is exactly what we have done. Their proposed new electoral structure outlines that we will have a mayor elected by and from among councillors. That decision was made after consulting with the local Geelong community. If those opposite are so delusional that they think that the Geelong community is still supporting a directly elected mayor, they have got it very, very wrong, because they are not.

I continually talk to people in my electorate about the role of the directly elected mayor and what they think about that role. They see it as a waste of money. They see it as an opportunity for one person to take power within the council. There are a whole lot of reasons for that. What they want to see is a council that works for them, and they see that being achieved through a mayor elected by the councillors, along with a deputy mayor, for a period of two years. That is what the jury has come up with, and that is what I hear from members of my community about how they want to see the City of Greater Geelong structured. They are sick and tired of money being spent, very badly I might say. In a period of about three years we have had two mayors who were directly elected. Hundreds of thousands of dollars went into the election process and then, particularly with our second directly elected mayor, there were enormous costs in setting up a palatial office with lots of staff. He said, 'I want this, I want that'. The Geelong people do not want that. They just want a council to represent them as a local council and to listen to what they got to say.

From the amendment that will be put forward by the opposition, it looks like they want three different elections. They have not put up the Melbourne model, which is what they keep harping on about, so I am not really sure what it is they want. I am a bit confused about what the opposition is actually saying they want.

The citizens jury made a significant contribution to putting this bill together. We should show some courtesy to them and seriously consider what they have done. It is disrespectful of those opposite, together with a number of councillors who were dismissed, to attack those people. They are just normal, everyday people in our community who put their hands up to represent their community. There is nothing wrong with that, but they are being condemned by those opposite and by councillors who were dismissed as being a farce. I know they find that very offensive, as I would. What we need to be looking at here is what the people of Geelong want, and everybody in this chamber should be looking at what this community wants.

Mr Katos interjected.

Ms COUZENS — The member for South Barwon can say, 'It's what I want'. He does not even know if I agree with the citizens jury recommendations. What I am saying is that we need to respect whatever that group of people came up with because they were charged with the task of coming up with a proposed model. It is a matter of respect to take on board what the Geelong community has put up. We need to take what they have said as being the preferred option.

Mr Katos interjected.

Ms COUZENS — The member for South Barwon can sing all he likes, but I can assure him now that many of his own constituents do not agree with what he is saying. They agree that we need a mayor appointed by councillors. They do not want a directly elected mayor. They are sick of wasting taxpayers money on putting mayors in place who don their robes, put on the chains and fluff around but do not actually do anything. The previous mayor who we have just got rid of is a racist. In the *Geelong Advertiser* a few weeks ago he was condemning black African people. Really? Is that the sort of leader we want in Geelong? No, we do not. We need to take on board what citizens jury has recommended, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) — I rise to speak on the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017. It is always good to see a lot of passion in the chamber about local government. Certainly the Greens and I are very passionate about local government and are very big supporters of the local government sector and local communities.

This bill comes about as a result of the sacking of the Geelong council following very serious allegations about bullying and dysfunction within the council. We are certainly pleased that elections will be held this year rather than in 2020, thanks to amendments in the other place.

And we certainly welcome, through the citizens jury, the consultation with the citizens of the City of Greater Geelong regarding the future of their local municipality. Certainly we would like to see that model extended to other municipalities across a wide range of areas and initiatives where informed residents are presented with opportunities to consider all those options; particularly I think it would be good to see that expanded in respect of the planning of major infrastructure in local communities.

I am just going to speak briefly on this bill. In regard to the provisions, the Greens certainly support the abolition and removal of the directly elected mayor and deputy mayor. This drift towards the failed City of Melbourne model of direct election of mayor and deputy mayor was really harmful to the City of Greater Geelong and democratic representation there. Now that we are removing it from Geelong, I would seriously urge the government to consider its worth for the City of Melbourne and also seriously consider reforms for the City of Melbourne to remove the changes made under, I believe, Premier Kennett that give two votes to each business over one for each

resident, which means an overseas telecommunications company can get two votes because it owns a mobile phone tower within the municipality.

Good democratic governance at a local government level, the Greens believe, is always best served by multimember wards and an election of the mayor and deputy mayor by their fellow councillors. It certainly serves other cities and rural cities and shires in Victoria very well.

Where we do have issue with this bill is how the multimember wards will be formed. Between November 2015 to March 2016 the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) conducted an electoral representation review of the Greater Geelong City Council. That review included two rounds of consultation. Following this process the VEC recommended that there should be three wards with three councillors and one ward, the less populated northern ward, with two; however, the government has indicated that it is going to go with the central Geelong ward having two councillors.

The VEC has expertise in determining electoral representation. We might not necessarily agree with them all the time, but they certainly are experts in this field on setting ward boundaries, on councillor numbers, on democratic representations, reflecting the changes in municipalities and preventing gerrymandering, which is a concern.

The Greens are concerned that the Minister for Local Government is going to interfere or not adhere to this VEC review process, as has already occurred. In fact I understand they are the only minister who has ever rejected the recommendations of the VEC and its processes. In 2016 the VEC recommended that the Yarra Ranges Shire Council structure change from having nine wards with one councillor in each to three wards with three councillors each. Of course, I think this would have been a win for the local community, with a far more democratic representation; however, the Minister for Local Government rejected that recommendation, rejected the VEC's recommendations and moved to have the Yarra Ranges shire remain a council with nine single-member wards. This is a really worrying precedent set in terms of ministerial intervention in electoral reviews.

I understand there are amendments put forward by the opposition. These amendments go largely to restoring the directly elected mayor and directly elected deputy mayor. As I have indicated, certainly the Greens oppose

the direct election of the mayor and deputy mayor, so we will not be supporting those amendments.

On the whole the bill does do the City of Greater Geelong and the people of Greater Geelong a good service in reforming the roles of the mayor and deputy mayor by having them elected by their fellow councillors. We do have concerns about ministerial intervention in setting the ward boundaries and the allocation of councillors, but overall we support this bill.

Mr DONNELLAN (Minister for Roads and Road Safety) — I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Mr Katos — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the National Party has not made a contribution yet and I think it would be inappropriate to adjourn the debate until it does so.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Blandthorn) — Order! Thank you, I take the point of order. I call the member for Gippsland East.

Mr T. BULL (Gippsland East) — It is a pleasure to rise to make a relatively short contribution on the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017. I appreciate the cooperation of the minister at the table. We welcome the element of this bill that brings the council back into operation. The reason is that we successfully amended legislation last year to ensure the earlier return of the council this year. Of course, in line with that, we support that element of the bill.

However, there are other elements of the bill that were very eloquently outlined by the member for Mornington in his contribution that we believe should be reconsidered. Primarily this relates to the intended removal of the directly elected mayor. This is something that the community of Geelong sought to have put in place for quite a considerable period of time. We have heard contributions from both sides of the chamber that express a different opinion in relation to whether the people of Geelong actually want this or not.

An indication is in two separate surveys that were run through the *Geelong Advertiser* directly in relation to this proposition. The results of both those surveys were overwhelmingly in favour of a direct mayoral election. The first came in with 73.9 per cent in favour; the second came in with an increased margin of 78.5 per cent of the people of Geelong. So you are looking at four people in five — it is just under that, but you could round it off to say four people in five — in Geelong who are seeking a directly elected mayor. So I think to

say that it is something that the people of Geelong do not want is not an accurate reflection of the fact.

It appears that the government is basing its argument or its proposition on removing the ability of directly electing a mayor on the support of the citizens jury that it has appointed. I think the government's description of the people who served on the jury was 'average Geelong citizens', but they — this small demographic, this small cohort — only narrowly voted to remove the right of residents to elect their own mayor, but of course even that is dependent on how you would read the information. But if it was such a very near thing, as has been widely reported, it is clearly not a clear-cut view from what is a relatively small representation of the people of Geelong.

Another element of this decision is that there have been concerns raised that this view was reached after members of the panel perhaps — and I am sure that they acted in very good faith — were fed selected information on which to base their decisions. This would align with the fact that the Labor Party has always opposed the proposition of having a directly elected mayor in Geelong. They rejected it out of hand when it was raised under the previous Brumby government, and of course we also had a continual procession of attacks on the mayor of the day from local Labor Party members.

So we then have the proposal that the mayor and the deputy mayor be elected for a period of two years; this is the proposition that has been put forth. The great question is why. Why are we looking at a two-year period? Is there any need to have a different structure in Geelong than we have across all the other councils in Victoria, both metropolitan based and rural and regional? Of course there is nothing now in place that stops a mayor in any municipality serving a second year, third year or fourth year if they are re-elected, but one must ask why we looking at the proposition of removing the possibility of replacing a mayor after one year. There is no valid argument for doing that.

It also poses the question about the consultation process with the wider community outside the citizens jury. These are big moves, and we have had 100 people put together with varying opinions, which they have admitted themselves on the citizens jury — greatly varying opinions — but now we have what appear to be 100 people with differing views dictating what is going to be the policy that local government operates under in Geelong.

As the member for Mornington mentioned in his speech — and he made a very valid point — this is an

unusual structure that puts a filter between the ratepayers of the municipality and the government of the day that makes the decisions. And when that filter is not clear-cut in what it wants to do and wants in place — and they have admitted there are vastly differing opinions — it really is a quite bizarre series of events that have us arriving at this particular point in time.

The minister supported the findings of this group of 100 people in relation to ward boundaries as well, and those recommendations have been passed on to the Victorian Electoral Commission, so clearly they are dictating what the structure is going to be in Geelong. When we are talking about the validity of the citizens jury — and I stress again that I am sure that they worked hard and to the best of their abilities and all did a good job — I want to quote from the citizens jury interim report of November 2016. This is what the citizens jury itself had to say:

The decision on electing a mayor took us considerable time, and opinions swung frequently. The final decision was based on a rating scale of Love It, Like It, Live With It, Lament It, Loathe It. Seventy-nine per cent voted 'Live With It' or above for the directly elected mayor option, in comparison to 84 per cent voting 'Live With It' or above for the council-elected mayor option.

No-one in this chamber could possibly say that is a clear-cut result from the citizens jury. There is no possible way anybody could argue the proposition that that is a clear-cut result from the citizens jury. The citizens jury went on to say that:

Prior to this —

the 79 per cent and 84 per cent situation —

we had close to a 50-50 vote with the 'yes/no' options. There was a significant group who were undecided unless further aspirational changes occurred for the directly elected mayor option. Clarifying these options may have changed the results.

There are great clouds of uncertainty over this decision. We have relied on a group of 100 people to come up with a proposition that was far from unanimous. It is hardly what you could possibly call in anyone's language a clear-cut result, and that is the very reason why we will move, and strongly support, the amendments circulated by the member for Mornington.

Mr DONNELLAN (Minister for Roads and Road Safety) — I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — On the question of adjourning the debate, this is a bill that the opposition has flagged as particularly deserving consideration in detail. It is a bill that makes far-reaching changes to the

structure of the City of Greater Geelong governance. We have a range of detailed amendments that we wish to propose. The second-reading debate speakers for this bill have spoken, so there is absolutely no reason why this bill should not proceed to be considered in detail at this stage.

Certainly we on this side of the house are in a position to proceed to do that, and our view is that that is exactly what ought to be happening. Otherwise we will be starting debate on another bill with less than 25 minutes of the sitting time this evening available. It does not seem to make a lot of sense to do that. It would be far more sensible for us to continue with the City of Greater Geelong Amendment Bill 2017, make a start on the consideration-in-detail stage this evening and then resume that when the house reconvenes tomorrow. We believe that is the more appropriate course to follow.

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong) — I note the concerns that the member for Box Hill has iterated, but I note that we have a very full and important legislative agenda ahead of us. I personally am due to speak on the debate on the Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2017, which I understand will soon be following and which goes to the heart of some of the law and order concerns that those opposite speak about with monotonous regularity. I would have thought that it would be in the interests of this Parliament and certainly in the interests of the community for us to move on to that legislation, which we know is of concern to a great number of Victorians — and those opposite claim that it is of great concern to them — rather than further teasing out an issue for political reasons that I think we have heard about quite substantially with quite fulsome contributions so far. So I put on the record my view that we should in fact move on to what is a very important legislative agenda, particularly in that space of community safety and law and order.

Mr T. BULL (Gippsland East) — It is a pleasure to make a relatively brief contribution on the motion. I can only support the commentary that was provided by the manager of opposition business. This is a bill that does deserve to go into consideration in detail. As we have heard from a number of speakers on this side of the house, none more important than the member for South Barwon, there are a number of issues around this bill that are not clear cut and that very much need to be looked at in considerably more detail. The whole proposition that a number of speakers have addressed — relying on a select citizens jury to shape the future of local government in Geelong in opposition to what is the standard practice across the rest of Victoria — is something that we as a Parliament should

be looking at in a consideration-in-detail stage. This is a very, very important bill relating to the future of local government within the Geelong area, and for the reasons outlined by the manager of opposition business I support his call that we take this bill to a consideration-in-detail stage.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) — This is another example of the coalition looking to stall our legislative program and agenda. It is law and order that is next on the agenda, something that we all care dearly about — community safety, and debating some of the community safety agenda that has been put forward by the Attorney-General today, some of that work that has been among the most significant reforms, if not the most significant reform, in Victoria. It is another proposed truncation of debate on those important reforms that this government is getting on with delivering and putting through this Parliament. People want to speak and contribute on that bill.

The opposition suggests that it is time to go into a consideration-in-detail stage on this bill and that other people want to speak on it. We just have to look at that side and how many people there have offered to rock up for this debate — not too many. Not too many on that side want to speak or contribute. If they were fair dinkum about it, they would be back in the house listening to this debate. This is just another stalling tactic. Those opposite, who probably have not prepped with their bill briefing and probably do not have their next speech ready to go — the shadow Attorney-General is not here ready to go on the next bill — are stalling. We need to get on with our legislative agenda and get on to the Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2017, which is so very important. Let us get on with it, and let us get on to that bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Blandthorn) — The member for south-west Barwon.

Mr KATOS (South Barwon) — South Barwon.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Blandthorn) — Sorry, South Barwon.

Mr KATOS — That is all right; it is close.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr KATOS — Actually, I would not mind South-West Coast — it has got a better margin.

I rise to support the comments of the manager of opposition business. Geelong is Victoria's second city, and this is an important debate around the future of

Geelong's electoral structure as far as its council goes. It deserves more than just over an hour's debate. It is not my fault that this government has truncated the sitting week and wants to try to get four bills plus a take-note motion up in two days. That is not the fault of the people of Geelong, Victoria's second city.

The Minister for Local Government is actually in the chamber now, so she should be ready to go. She would be quite happy to come down to the table, and we could go straight into consideration in detail. Whilst I understand that the next bill, the Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2017, is an important bill, this is about the future of the second-largest city in our state. The clauses in this bill need to be debated in a fulsome manner in a consideration-in-detail stage, particularly around the direct election of the mayor and the council and ward structure. These are questions that need to be put to the minister in a consideration-in-detail stage.

The government had agreed to go into consideration in detail. In the debate on the government business program this morning the Leader of the House certainly said that if time permits, we would go into consideration in detail on this bill. Well, time permits — let us go for it. The minister is here. She is talking to the advisers now. She is quite happy to come down to the table, and we can go straight into consideration in detail. I might have upset her dinner plans, actually — I am not sure. But let us do this right now, because Geelong deserves better than just over an hour's debate on the future of the city. I support the manager of opposition business in opposing the adjournment of debate on this bill. We should simply go straight into consideration in detail here and now.

House divided on Mr Donnellan's motion:

Ayes, 45

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Allan, Ms | Knight, Ms |
| Andrews, Mr | Languiller, Mr |
| Blandthorn, Ms | Lim, Mr |
| Bull, Mr J. | McGuire, Mr |
| Carbines, Mr | Merlino, Mr |
| Couzens, Ms | Nardella, Mr |
| D'Ambrosio, Ms | Noonan, Mr |
| Dimopoulos, Mr | Pakula, Mr |
| Donnellan, Mr | Pallas, Mr |
| Edbrooke, Mr | Pearson, Mr |
| Edwards, Ms | Perera, Mr |
| Eren, Mr | Richardson, Mr |
| Foley, Mr | Richardson, Ms |
| Garrett, Ms | Scott, Mr |
| Graley, Ms | Spence, Ms |
| Green, Ms | Staikos, Mr |
| Halfpenny, Ms | Suleyman, Ms |
| Hennessy, Ms | Thomas, Ms |
| Hibbins, Mr | Thomson, Ms |

Howard, Mr
Hutchins, Ms
Kairouz, Ms
Kilkenny, Ms

Ward, Ms
Williams, Ms
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 37

Angus, Mr
Asher, Ms
Battin, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Britnell, Ms
Bull, Mr T.
Burgess, Mr
Clark, Mr
Crisp, Mr
Dixon, Mr
Gidley, Mr
Guy, Mr
Hodgett, Mr
Katos, Mr
Kealy, Ms
McCurdy, Mr
McLeish, Ms
Morris, Mr
Northe, Mr

O'Brien, Mr M.
Paynter, Mr
Pesutto, Mr
Riordan, Mr
Ryall, Ms
Ryan, Ms
Sheed, Ms
Smith, Mr R.
Smith, Mr T.
Southwick, Mr
Staley, Ms
Thompson, Mr
Tilley, Mr
Victoria, Ms
Wakeling, Mr
Walsh, Mr
Watt, Mr
Wells, Mr

increasing in frequency. We have had the worst prison riot in Victoria's history at the Metropolitan Remand Centre in June 2015, costing tens of millions of dollars of expense to the taxpayer and taking hundreds of maximum security beds offline in the process of adjustment that has been involved. We have had increasing numbers of prisoners not being presented for court in contravention of a court order requiring their appearance and delaying justice for victims and increasing costs for taxpayers.

This crisis, which has also been reflected in a rapid increase in the number of prisoners in police cells, has not been due to a government acting decisively to respond to emerging deficiencies in the parole or other systems and acting decisively to keep the community safe, as happened under the previous government. It has been due to the chronic incompetence of the current government in making provision for increasing numbers of offenders and in dealing with the aftermath of the riot at the Metropolitan Remand Centre.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Debate adjourned until later this day.

**CORRECTIONS LEGISLATION
MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENT
BILL 2017**

Second reading

**Debate resumed from 10 May; motion of
Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Police).**

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — The Corrections Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2017 is a bill that makes a number of modest amendments to corrections legislation. Some of those amendments address deficiencies and oversights in previous legislation of this government. Other provisions in it appear to open up the risk of further problems for the future.

What is clear is that this bill does not tackle the fundamentals of the crisis that has developed in Victoria's corrections system under the current government. We have had situations with prisoners being caught cultivating and growing drugs in a prison garden. We have had a substantial increase in disturbances within prisons. We have had prisoners refusing to work, even purporting to hold a strike at the maximum security Barwon Prison.

We have had a series of attacks on hardworking prison officers and staff, and those attacks do not seem to be at all under control; they seem to be recurring if not

We have also had a growing problem of contraband coming into the prison system, including reports of drugs and other items being thrown over prison walls for prisoners to be able to obtain access to. And of course we have had a series of escapes from prison again on a steadily recurring basis, including the first escape from a walled maximum security prison since June 2001. So there is no doubt that the Victorian corrections system is in crisis under the current government. Yet this bill before us fails to tackle these serious problems.

As I referred to at the outset, a number of the provisions in this bill are simply picking up on oversights or deficiencies in legislation that this government has previously brought in or it is making consequential changes flowing on from previous measures — consequential changes that arguably could well have been made at the time.

To turn to some of those provisions in more detail, we have amendments to the Serious Sex Offenders (Detention and Supervision) Act 2009. As the second-reading speech indicates, those provisions seek to make it easier for courts to update the core conditions of supervision orders, being core conditions under a structure that was largely put in place by the Serious Sex Offenders (Detention and Supervision) Amendment (Community Safety) Act 2016.

What the bill does is something that arguably should well have been done at the time of the 2016 legislation, which is insert an amendment allowing core conditions of an interim supervision order to be updated without

the requirement for the secretary to satisfy the legal test currently set out in the act. That is itself a reasonable provision to which this side of the house does not take exception but, as I say, it seems to be a provision that probably should have been picked up and incorporated in the 2016 legislation, so this provision in the bill before us is, in that sense, simply a catch-up.

There are some provisions allowing greater powers to examine, seize and delete inappropriate material on electronic devices held by offenders. Obviously the objective of those provisions is unexceptional. There are a range of other provisions that are referred to in the bill about clarifying who is to hear various matters and to make changes to the provisions relating to reporting on the use of force by corrections staff or Victoria Police.

The bill also makes some changes to the range of serious violent offenders to whom stricter parole laws will apply. These changes seem largely directed again at catch-ups to ensure that the existing regime picks up on some of the new offences that have been created in recent times, such as aggravated home invasion, home invasion, aggravated carjacking and carjacking. The bill also includes in the list the offences of defensive homicide and some terrorism and foreign incursion offences, as referred to in the second-reading speech. Again, as I say, in the main they are provisions that arguably should have been picked up and reflected in the legislation at the time of the creation of these new offences.

There are also provisions in the bill relating to improving information sharing and to allow the sharing of personal or confidential information about prisoners, parolees and offenders or former offenders into a somewhat broader range of categories that are set out in the second-reading speech for the purpose of what is defined as corrections-related legislation, including the Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997, the Mental Health Act 2014, the Family Violence Protection Act 2008, the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010, the administration of the Working with Children Act 2005 and orders under the Sentencing Act 1991, and then in relation to a range of other specified purposes, including the commonwealth Migration Act 1958 by the secretary of the Adult Parole Board of Victoria for official duties by persons delivering services or advice on behalf of the Australian Federal Police for official duties and by the Victorian Electoral Commission to establish a prisoner's entitlement to vote.

These all seem straightforward and reasonable provisions. In fact they reinforce the importance of

having sensible information-sharing regimes across government, which is something that we on this side of the house have been championing for a number of years. Indeed under the previous government the Assistant Treasurer, Mr Rich-Phillips in the Legislative Council, and I, in my capacity as Attorney-General, both put a considerable effort into establishing a regime which would allow greater information sharing across government, because we recognised — as indeed hopefully all sensible governments should recognise — that there is a lot of data within government that can be put to much better use on the public's behalf, either through making data more broadly available to the community in general in appropriate instances, such as, for example — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time appointed by sessional orders for me to interrupt business has now arrived. The honourable member may continue his speech when the matter is next before the Chair.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Malka Leifer

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) — (12 683) Tonight I wish to raise an important issue in the Caulfield electorate, being the actions of an alleged child abuser who has dodged the law. The action I seek is for the Premier to do what he can to have her extradited back to Victoria and face the courts. Unfortunately this issue — the alleged sexual abuse of children by a former principal at Adass Israel School in Elsternwick — continues to be ever present in the lives of many, particularly those victims that have suffered.

Former principal Malka Leifer is wanted by Victoria Police on 74 charges of indecent assault and rape allegedly involving girls at the Adass Israel School in Melbourne. In 2008 after accusations were first raised against her, the former principal fled to Israel with her family in the middle of the night, allegedly with the help of senior members of the community.

A Jerusalem judge has ruled that Malka Leifer is not mentally fit to face extradition proceedings to Australia. Media reports over the last few days have outlined that the ex-principal, who is wanted on these 74 charges of child abuse, has been seen publicly at celebrations in

Israel, where it is claimed she is avoiding extradition to Australia and our state in order to appear in court.

I call on the Premier to ensure that Victoria Police has all the resources that are necessary to prosecute the case with the 74 charges laid. Victoria Police has obviously done much to bring the accused to justice, but I want the Premier to assure my constituents, law-abiding members of the community and of the Adass community, and all those touched by the terrible events that everything will be done that is necessary to bring this accused back for trial.

Despite the fact that the accused is overseas, if any information is required or resources are needed, if additional action is needed to further assist in the extradition efforts via the Australian government, then the Premier and Victorian government must act promptly and urgently for the sake of the survivors and the families involved in the courts and others that have been touched by this evil of child sexual abuse.

I have spoken today to one of the victims, who wished to seek justice, as do other victims. As we have seen, this Parliament has championed addressing child abuse, with the first parliamentary inquiry into it held here. It is time for us to act and do what we can to bring Malka Leifer back to face the courts.

Craigieburn ambulance station

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke) — (12 684) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update to Yuroke residents on the time line for construction of the new Craigieburn ambulance station. As the minister is no doubt aware, Craigieburn is a rapidly growing community that has welcomed many thousands of new residents over a fairly short period. Our community has a terrific team at the current Craigieburn ambulance station, both paramedics and an outstanding community emergency response team. However, as our community continues to grow, the announcement of a new ambulance station, additional staff and a new vehicle is warmly welcomed. I thank the minister for her tireless efforts to improve ambulance response times across the state and look forward to an update from her on this vital piece of local infrastructure.

Drouin ambulance station

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — (12 685) I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that she intervene in the Drouin ambulance situation and deliver a much-needed

permanent ambulance station for Drouin. Drouin is the largest town in country Victoria still without a permanent 24-hour ambulance facility. Drouin has a population of around 16 000. It is growing at a very rapid rate and is expected to reach 20 000 by 2020. Ambulance Victoria funded the staff allocation for a 24-hour service in Drouin over 12 months ago. The staff are located in Drouin in a temporary location during daylight hours, but outside those hours they are located at Warragul ambulance station, which is 10 minutes further away to the east. The response times to Drouin and further west to towns like Longwarry and Bunyip are seriously compromised outside daylight hours.

Ambulance Victoria have been trying to secure another temporary location in Drouin that can be staffed 24 hours a day. I understand that this facility will become available later this year. It is very disappointing that it will be almost two years since funding was provided for a 24-hour ambulance service in Drouin. It is also very unfortunate that this site is not in a perfect location, and a more suitable permanent location must be sought in the town.

I call on the minister to intervene and prioritise the search and funding for the new permanent Ambulance Victoria facility in Drouin. The safety of residents in one of the fastest growing communities in Victoria does not deserve to be left exposed to very poor ambulance response times any longer.

Our hardworking ambulance officers also deserve to be located in the community they are serving at a location that gives them the best opportunity possible to respond as quickly as possible. Having them located in an appropriate location in Drouin will also enable a much quicker response to towns to the south, north and west. Towns like Longwarry, Bunyip, Tynong, Drouin West, Drouin South, Athlone and Ripplebrook will all benefit from an ambulance station manned 24 hours a day in Drouin, so I urge the minister to act on this issue as a matter of urgency.

Sunbury police numbers

Mr J. BULL (Sunbury) — (12 686) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is that the minister visit my electorate to meet with members of our brave, hardworking and dedicated police force. I would be very pleased to see the minister meet with some of our newest recruits, who form part of the 3135 additional police the Andrews Labor government is recruiting to keep Victorians safe.

Last year we made the single biggest investment in Victoria Police: \$2 billion to recruit an additional 2729 police over four years. This came on top of the 406 additional police funded in the 2016–17 budget and those who are being recruited now, bringing the total number of new police to 3135. This is a fantastic announcement and will be very warmly welcomed in my community. I am hopeful the minister will be able to meet with the first batch of 300 officers. Eighty-nine of these officers will be deployed in the Fawkner division of Victoria Police, with 36 of these specifically assigned to the Hume police service area covering Sunbury.

The Andrews Labor government is getting on with the job of providing the support services that our communities need to keep Victorians safe. I would like to put on the record tonight my sincere appreciation for the hard work, dedication and commitment of all of Victoria's police, and I look forward to the minister visiting my electorate.

Downey and Grant streets, Alexandra

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) — (12 687) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for him to improve the dangerous intersection of the Maroondah and Goulburn Valley highways in Alexandra so that the risk of accident is reduced and safety for all the town is improved. The highways intersect in the centre of the town, at which point they are known as Downey and Grant streets. Downey Street carries traffic travelling between Eildon and Healesville. Lake Eildon National Park and Fraser camping area are key tourist destinations in the area. It is not unusual that tourists are driving large, powerful vehicles often towing a boat or a van. In addition, local traffic and businesses use this key road. Schools are located in this precinct as well. Grant Street is the main shopping precinct in town. There is much vehicle and foot traffic. It includes older persons, schoolchildren and young parents with toddlers or prams.

This intersection is cause for much concern and debate in town. It is known to be notorious. However, as there have been no fatalities at this intersection it seems to be deemed as being okay. As reported in the *Alexandra Standard* in February this year, over the last five years VicRoads has documented only one incident involving a cyclist. While VicRoads has failed to account for the accidents that do occur, Alexandra locals know just how troublesome the intersection is. Many motorists fail to obey the traffic signs, whilst visitors to Alexandra are often confused by the change from the Maroondah Highway to the Goulburn Valley Highway,

and vice versa. For those unfamiliar with the intersection, it can be difficult to work out who has the right of way. The design and physical nature of the intersection is the major contributing factor to its hazardous nature.

Alexandra locals have been concerned about the safety of this intersection for many years. The government must listen to their concerns and take action to have them addressed. The mix of local traffic, tourist traffic and large vehicles such as trucks and buses together with pedestrians and cyclists is a deadly combination. I know residents are passionate in their belief that this menacing intersection is dangerous and poses an unacceptable risk. There have been many near misses and accidents. I also know this intersection well and drive through it regularly. I am cautious and approach the intersection carefully, as I know that it is tricky, particularly for those unfamiliar with the area. I ask the minister to investigate the matter with a view to having the necessary changes made in the near future.

Macedon electorate rail services

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) — (12 688) The adjournment matter I wish to raise this evening is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister join with me and visit V/Line commuters in my electorate at one or a couple of the seven V/Line stations in Macedon. I would like the minister to see for herself what an incredible difference the announcement of new V/Line services will make for my constituents. It was fantastic on the morning of 9 May to join with the minister, the Premier and many of my regional colleagues at Southern Cross station where we announced the 142 new V/Line services across the network. These of course are in addition to 80 that were announced in January. The Minister for Public Transport is doing a fantastic job. She has a real passion and a vision for V/Line. It is much appreciated by constituents in my electorate, and I look forward to welcoming her to Macedon soon.

Route 58 tram stop

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) — (12 689) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for minister to fix the tram stop at the corner of Chapel Street and Toorak Road, stop 128 on route 58 outbound. This stop is notoriously unsafe for commuters getting off at this stop and many have raised it with me personally and indeed I have witnessed issues at this stop. It has been raised a number of times on the Victoria Walks spot map and the Greens Transport Troubles map as well. Some of the comments, which I will read into *Hansard*, are:

Traffic does not stop when tram stops.

Three lanes of traffic and usually the left-hand turn lane drives right past a stationary tram. Extremely dangerous for passengers alighting tram.

So dangerous because of the development of the corner. All traffic are looking forward. It needs a proper tram stop!

Agreed. This is one of the most dangerous tram stops I know. Drivers just don't stop when they should. Platform tram stop needed (with appropriate pedestrian priority).

Such a dangerous intersection. Cars don't stop heading out of the city. They are accelerating down the hill to get past the tram. How someone isn't hit on a daily basis as they get off the tram is beyond me.

It's incredibly dangerous to exit an eastbound tram at this stop, as cars routinely speed past the stopped tram (there are two lanes to cross to the pavement).

I wrote to the previous member for Prahran, Yarra Trams and VicRoads on this matter in February 2011 — there has been no evident change in the past six years!

I have raised this issue previously, and in the minister's response she stated:

I have requested that PTV continues to work with relevant safety authorities and Yarra Trams to continue to monitor the tram stop.

I would certainly like to know what the results of that monitoring of the tram stop are, and I would urge the minister to fix this dangerous tram stop.

Victorian Jobs Partnership

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) — (12 690) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Industry and Employment. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update to jobseekers and young people in my electorate on the government's jobs partnership and explain to them how and when they can benefit from it. Recently I have spoken to several constituents who are looking for work and keen to update their skills to help them find a job. They have the potential to make important contributions to our community if given the opportunity to work. Finding and participating in meaningful work is one of the greatest forms of social justice. I understand the recently announced Victorian Jobs Partnership will allow workers to share in our state's economic success. It is terrific to hear that Victoria now leads the nation in jobs growth, with more jobs created in Victoria over the last year than in the rest of Australia combined. I know many jobseekers in Carrum electorate are keen to receive an update from the minister on this important partnership program and what it means for them.

Warrnambool Special Development School

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) — (12 691) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is confirmation that the Warrnambool Special Development School (SDS) will receive funding to build their new school in the 2017–18 financial year. Minister, as you know, in 2014 you promised you would rebuild the Warrnambool SDS, in 2015 you gave \$5 million to buy the land and do the planning and in 2016 you announced that the land had been purchased. You said that only Labor would finish the job; I ask that you deliver what you promised.

Since then the school has worked with the department to develop plans. These plans are well developed. Architectural drawings to the department's specifications are done, samples of interior and exterior materials have been provided and costings have been discussed with the school council. The school was led to believe that the funding for the next stage was imminent, but when the budget was handed down there was nothing new listed for the Warrnambool SDS, leaving the project stalled.

I have been contacted by a number of parents who are devastated, and now the community has gotten behind the school and is loudly advocating for its completion. The school organised a public meeting, but in the days leading up to the meeting the school council was contacted by the department, which said that they are supporting the school to progress this project, that the original departmental commitment to the project stood and that the school simply needed to work through a process. This gave the school council confidence that the community support and advocacy had gained a result, so the meeting was cancelled. I am pleased the school council feels they are being supported, but the \$5 million is the only funding committed to date, and that will not finish this job.

This school is at capacity. The school was built for 30 students; there are now 131 enrolled at the school. The staff are doing an incredible job sharing small, cramped spaces — for example, the library is someone's office and is inaccessible to students in wheelchairs. Should all children not have the ability to access a library to choose their own books? There are three separate lunchbreaks because the kids cannot all fit into the playground at once. There is very little or no grass area, and these kids cannot even kick a football or play cricket without putting each other in danger.

Most importantly there is no room for any more classrooms. In 2008 four portable classrooms were placed in the top play area, which helped ease the

overcrowding at the time but made it very obvious there was little room for expansion. There were 67 students in 10 separate classrooms then, and in 2017 there are 131 students in 17 separate classes. The school has one therapy area shared between several specialists, physical education teachers, fitness instructors and occupational therapists, and that is one area for 131 students. There is no spare room to serve as offices, meeting rooms or quiet workplaces. How can you justify a 60 per cent cut in funding for regional schools when you have an \$8.3 billion surplus? This is an ask of 0.2 per cent of that surplus. Minister, the parents, teachers and children need a commitment from you so they can get on and build a school that is of the same standard as every other school in this state.

Sandringham Hospital

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) — (12 692) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to update my community on when construction will commence on Sandringham Hospital's new day procedure surgery centre. It was an absolute pleasure to recently visit Sandringham Hospital to make a fantastic announcement that the hospital will get a new day procedure surgery centre. There has been an extraordinary fundraising campaign by bayside residents, including the Sandringham Community Bank, and I also note the Goodman Group and the Moorabbin Airport Corporation have made contributions along with the many, many individual donations that have gone to well over half of the contribution needed for this surgery day centre.

We now have a time line for when we will get underway with construction down the track because the Andrews Labor government, as part of our more than \$400 million investment in hospital upgrades, is putting in \$1.6 million for Sandringham Hospital. I would like to acknowledge the work of the director of nursing, Judy Reeves, who has been an outstanding advocate in this area, and of the many people who contributed to this project. Of course 36 per cent of patients come from the City of Kingston, a municipality I represent a large part of, and 38 per cent come from the City of Bayside. I also note that the member for Sandringham would be in support of this investment and of the work of the community to get this underway. In conclusion I ask the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services when construction will start on the new day procedure surgery centre.

Responses

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — The member for Yuroke raised a matter for the Minister for Health about updating Yuroke residents regarding the new Craigieburn ambulance station, and I will pass that on.

The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Health seeking her intervention in regard to a permanent ambulance station for Drouin, and I will pass that on.

The member for Sunbury raised a matter for the Minister for Police seeking a meeting with his local police members, and I will pass that on.

The member for Eildon raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety seeking an improvement to the intersection of the Maroondah and Goulburn Valley highways in Alexandra, and I will pass that on.

The member for Macedon raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking that she visit V/Line commuters at one or more of the seven V/Line stations in the Macedon electorate, and I will pass that on.

The member for Prahran raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking a fix to the tram stop at the corner of Chapel Street and Toorak Road, and I will pass that on.

The member for Carrum raised a matter for the Minister for Industry and Employment seeking an update on the jobs partnership for jobseekers in her electorate, and I will pass that on.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking confirmation that Warrnambool Special Developmental School will receive construction funding in the 2017–18 financial year, and I will pass that on.

The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Health seeking an update on when construction will commence at the day surgery centre at Sandringham Hospital.

The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the Premier in regard to the extradition of the former principal of Adass Israel School, Ms Malka Leifer. I would dispose of that matter personally, but I do not believe that I can. I will pass it on to the Premier, but I can indicate to the house and to the member for Caulfield that it would be my expectation that the Premier will refer that matter to me as the Attorney-General. Whilst I will pass the matter on to the Premier, I can provide the following information to

the member for Caulfield. This matter was discussed by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and me within the last few weeks. I know that the member raised the question of resourcing for Victoria Police, but this is actually within the purview of the DPP and the DPP continues to actively seek the extradition of this individual through the Israeli judicial system. I can assure the member for Caulfield and his constituents that the DPP does continue that work with great diligence. I can further assure the member for Caulfield that should the DPP seek any support or assistance from me as Attorney-General in those endeavours, he shall receive it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7.21 p.m.