

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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

Thursday, 8 February 2018

(Extract from book 1)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable KEN LAY, AO, APM

The ministry

(from 16 October 2017)

Premier	The Hon. D. M. Andrews, MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Emergency Services	The Hon. J. A. Merlino, MP
Treasurer and Minister for Resources	The Hon. T. H. Pallas, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Major Projects	The Hon. J. Allan, MP
Minister for Industry and Employment	The Hon. B. A. Carroll, MP
Minister for Trade and Investment, Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy, and Minister for Small Business	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 Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence	The Hon. N. M. Hutchins, MP
Special Minister of State	The Hon. G. Jennings, MLC
Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and Minister for Local Government	The Hon. M. Kairouz, MP
Minister for Families and Children, Minister for Early Childhood Education and Minister for Youth Affairs	The Hon. J. Mikakos, MLC
Minister for Police and Minister for Water	The Hon. L. M. Neville, 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 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, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Graley,
Ms Kilkenny, Ms Knight, Mr McGuire, Mr Pearson, Mr Richardson, Ms Spence, Ms Suleyman,
Ms Thomson, Ms Ward and Ms Williams.

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 — Acting Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms Bridget Noonan

Council — Acting Clerk of the Parliaments and 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 ⁵	Morwell	Ind
Bull, Mr Joshua Michael	Sunbury	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ⁶	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 ⁷	Northcote	ALP
Dixon, Mr Martin Francis	Nepean	LP	Riordan, Mr Richard ⁸	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 ⁹	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	Prahan	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	Thorpe, Ms Lidia Alma ¹⁰	Northcote	Greens
Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Katos, Mr Andrew	South Barwon	LP	Victoria, Ms Heidi	Bayswater	LP
Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne	Lowan	Nats	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Murray Plains	Nats
Knight, Ms Sharon Patricia	Wendouree	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon	Tarneit	ALP	Watt, Mr Graham Travis	Burwood	LP
Lim, Mr Muy Hong	Clarinda	ALP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Rowville	LP
McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats	Williams, Ms Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
McGuire, Mr Frank	Broadmeadows	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹ Elected 31 October 2015

² Resigned 3 September 2015

³ Resigned 3 September 2015

⁴ ALP until 7 March 2017

⁵ Nats until 28 August 2017

⁶ Elected 14 March 2015

⁷ Died 23 August 2017

⁸ Elected 31 October 2015

⁹ Resigned 2 February 2015

¹⁰ Elected 18 November 2017

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 Noonan and Ms Thomson. (*Council*): Mr O’Sullivan, Mr Purcell and Ms Symes.

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Allan, Mr Clark, Ms Hutchins, Mr Merlino, Mr M. O’Brien, Mr Pakula 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 and Ms Spence. (*Council*): Ms Bath, Ms Patten and 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*): Dr Carling-Jenkins and 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 Gepp and Ms Patten.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Morris, Mr D. O’Brien, Mr Pearson, Mr T. Smith 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

THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2018

NOTICES OF MOTION

Removal..... 173

PETITIONS

Mansfield Secondary College..... 173

DOCUMENTS 173

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment 173

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Questions without notice and ministers statements 173

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Australia Day awards 173, 174, 176, 179

Ferntree Gully Cricket Club..... 174

Templeton Cricket Club 174

Michael Dragwidge..... 174

Wire rope barriers..... 175, 178

Plenty Road upgrade 175

High Street, Belmont 175

Tyabb Cricket Club 175

Hastings electorate visit 176

Crib Point fire brigade..... 176

Police in schools program 176

Janet McCalman..... 176

North Balwyn Bowls Club 176

Cambodia..... 176

Latrobe Valley quarries 177

John and Norma Bellerby..... 177

Latrobe Valley Street Machiners Car Club and

Royal Exchange Hotel Cork Club..... 177

Eltham Wildcats Basketball Club..... 177

Matthew O'Brien 177

Powerline Replacement Fund..... 178

Peter Gordon 178

Energy security 178

Australian Vietnamese Women's Association 179

Queen Victoria Market development 179

International Greek Language Day 179

Camelot Rise Primary School..... 180

Uniting East Burwood..... 180

Government performance 180

Level crossing removals..... 180

Woolamai Beach Surf Life Saving Club 181

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS 181

FIREARMS AMENDMENT BILL 2017

Council's amendments 181, 203

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS

STATEMENTS

Fire services..... 190, 191, 192

Ministers statements: health funding 191, 193

Energy security 193, 194, 195, 196

Ministers statements: perinatal anxiety and depression 195

Ministers statements: federal budget 196

AusNet Services 197

Ministers statements: Specialisterne Australia 199

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Ferntree Gully electorate..... 201

Thomastown electorate 201

Gippsland East electorate..... 201

Yuroke electorate..... 201

Warrandyte electorate..... 201

Macedon electorate 202

Northcote electorate..... 202

Williamstown electorate..... 202

Ripon electorate..... 202

Dandenong electorate..... 202

LABOUR HIRE LICENSING BILL 2017

Second reading 215

Third reading 239

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (VICTIMS)

BILL 2017

Second reading 239

Third reading 239

Clerk's amendment..... 239

BAIL AMENDMENT (STAGE TWO) BILL 2017

Second reading 239

Third reading 239

ADJOURNMENT

Barwon Heads Road duplication 240

Ballarat Road, Albion, traffic lights..... 240

Ouyen railway sidings..... 240

Broadmeadows electorate employment..... 241

Mentone railway station 242

African-Australian community 242

Melton electorate roads 242

Early childhood education..... 243

Bass electorate roads 243

Glen Eira College..... 244

Responses..... 244

Thursday, 8 February 2018

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notice of motion given.

Removal

The SPEAKER (09:34) — Notices of motion 5 to 8 will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their notice to remain advise the Acting Clerk in writing before 2.00 p.m. today.

PETITIONS

Following petition presented to house:

Mansfield Secondary College

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the importance of providing modern facilities for students at Mansfield Secondary College.

In particular we note:

1. Mansfield Secondary College is the only secondary school in the entire Mansfield Shire Council.
2. Rapid population growth in Mansfield is creating unprecedented challenges for education services in the region.
3. Additional funding for upgrades is required urgently to allow works to be completed on the back of current works at the school.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly urges the Victorian government to provide the additional funding required to complete modernisation of Mansfield Secondary College.

By Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (340 signatures).

Tabled.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Acting Clerk:

Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 — Summary of Primary Return December 2017 and Summary of Variations Notified between 30 November 2017 and 6 February 2018 — Ordered to be published

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 6.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) (09:35) — I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday, 20 February 2018.

Motion agreed to.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Questions without notice and ministers statements

The SPEAKER (09:35) — In reporting back to the house, I wish to advise the member for Burwood, following a point of order that he raised both yesterday and on Tuesday in relation to unanswered constituency questions and a number of questions on notice, I wrote to the ministers involved on Tuesday seeking an answer to his questions.

Also on Tuesday the member for Box Hill raised a point of order about the responsiveness of the Premier's answer to the Leader of the Opposition's first supplementary question. After reviewing the transcript I consider the answer to be responsive.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

The SPEAKER (09:36) — Before calling the first members statement, I wish to advise the house that a member has sought approval to make a contribution today in the Greek language during question time. It will be performed in the Greek language.

Australia Day awards

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Police) (09:36) — It is with pleasure that I take this opportunity to congratulate four Bellarine residents who received 2018 Australia Day Honours. Dr Paul Hemming was made an Officer of the Order of Australia for his lifetime commitment to education, medicine and the wider community. Dr Hemming has provided strong leadership on a vast array of medical and education bodies and was a founding member of Beyondblue.

Diana Allen was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for her contribution to jazz music. She has, over many decades, been involved in numerous festivals and was the founder and principal of Jazz Australia. Locally Diana has contributed to

organisations like the Queenscliffe Historical Museum and the Barwon Heads Arts Council.

Therese McKenney received a Medal of the Order of Australia for her untiring work for various business and community organisations in Newport and now in her new home of Portarlington.

Barrie Provan received his much-deserved Order of Australia Medal for services to the community of Queenscliff. Barrie has been involved in many organisations, including the Queenscliff-Point Lonsdale Community Enterprise, the Good Shepherd nursing home and the Uniting Church.

I also congratulate the recipients of the Borough of Queenscliffe Australia Day awards. Citizen of the Year went to Rob Hurley for his outstanding contribution to the community. I have known and worked with Rob for many years, and it is a well-deserved award. Belle Kidd and Alexandra Scorgie were the joint winners of the Young Citizen of the Year award, and Queenscliff Primary School received the community event award for their efforts in organising this year's Biggest Morning Tea.

My congratulations to all of them, and I thank them for their contributions to our community.

Australia Day awards

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (09:38) — I recently had the pleasure of attending Knox City Council's Australia Day awards ceremony. I would like to pay tribute to those who were recognised for their work in our local community: Beryl Renton was recognised as a Local Hero and has done great work with Knox Women's Football Club as well as for our returned servicemen; Deidre Loveless was recognised as Environmentalist of the Year; Bryce Prissmann was awarded Young Citizen of the Year and is an active member of the Scoresby Secondary College and the Scoresby Country Fire Authority; Jane Meehan was awarded Volunteer of the Year for her great work with Girl Guides Victoria and can often be seen running the canteen at the Ferntree Gully Eagles Junior Football Club; and Hurtle Lupton, a former member of this house, was recognised as the Elder Citizen of the Year for his ongoing work since leaving the Parliament in helping our local community. I also pay tribute to Darren Wallace, a tireless environmental campaigner in the Knox community, who was recognised as Citizen of the Year.

Ferntree Gully Cricket Club

Mr WAKELING — Congratulations to the Ferntree Gully Cricket Club, which ran a very

successful Pink Stumps Day in support of breast cancer awareness. I pay tribute to all the work of the club. They have done some great work for all our local community. Well done and congratulations to all involved.

Templeton Cricket Club

Mr WAKELING — I also had the pleasure of visiting Templeton Cricket Club to see their newly refurbished oval. I would like to pay tribute to the work of Knox City Council as well as the federal government for funding this important upgrade. Congratulations to all involved at the Templeton club.

Michael Dragwidge

Mr CARROLL (Minister for Industry and Employment) (09:39) — I rise today to acknowledge the life of a great man, Michael Noel Dragwidge. Born on 24 February 1976, Michael lived a full life until he was taken away far too young at only 41 years of age on 20 December last year. Michael is survived by his parents, Lynette and Kevin Dragwidge, his sister, Amy, and his own beloved family — his wife, Georgina Dragwidge, and children, Maxwell and Matina.

I first met Michael at St Bernard's College when I was a younger man. He was always a source of enthusiasm and encouragement with a mind and personality beyond his years. He was a leader within the college through his charisma, decency and care for fellow students. We both shared a passion for politics, in particular the Labor Party. It was no coincidence we both embarked on arts degrees with majors in politics at La Trobe University.

As Georgina, his wife, eloquently explained in her eulogy, Michael chose La Trobe because it had Australia's best political thinkers, including Robert Manne and Judith Brett. La Trobe would also bring Georgina and Michael together as fellow students and political activists. Outside of study Michael and I both joined the local Niddrie Labor branch. Indeed it was Michael who helped recruit me. For my 21st birthday Michael gave me the late veteran Fairfax journalist Michael Gordon's biography of Prime Minister Paul Keating with a nice message written inside, which I will always treasure. Michael loved Paul Keating. As Georgina explained at his funeral, Keating's big-picture ideals, from Aboriginal reconciliation to the republican movement and greater engagement with Asia, were all ideals Michael believed in. He also admired Keating's quick wit and snappy dress sense.

Michael was farewelled at the packed Church of St Margaret Mary in Spotswood on 4 January. Such

was Michael's impact through his 41 years that in the church it was standing room only. Indeed the ceremony was broadcast outside. To his family I send my deepest condolences.

Wire rope barriers

Mr D. O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:41) — Yesterday morning at about 5.30 there was a very serious accident just to the east of Sale on the Princes Highway between Sale and Stratford, where a large truck went straight through a new centre-line barrier that has been installed recently as part of the rollout of these wire rope and other centre-line safety barriers.

I am calling today on the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to fully investigate this particular accident because there is serious concern about whether this new centre-line barrier that has only just been installed was in fact part of the problem rather than part of the solution with this accident. Of course the truck went straight through the new centre-line barrier, where the barrier began, and went straight across and hit a power pole on the other side of the road. In this case the barrier did not serve its purpose because it has been obliterated by the truck.

I am calling on the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to stop calling people names. We have had senior Country Fire Authority officers in Gippsland, we have had volunteers, we have had truckies and we have had motorcyclists and many others, including the vast majority of the public, worried about the rollout of these barriers and in particular where they have been placed. They cannot all be, as the minister said, 'banjo-playing dingbats'. This accident needs full investigation to ascertain whether the centre-line barrier helped, hindered or was indeed part of the cause of the accident. In the interests of full transparency the government must investigate.

Plenty Road upgrade

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change) (09:42) — Last Friday I had the pleasure of attending the commencement of the Plenty Road widening between McKimmies Road and Bush Boulevard. This is the first of two stages in this enormous \$139.4 million infrastructure project brought to you by our government, the Andrews Labor government.

It is a busy road. Approximately 52 000 vehicles use Plenty Road between these two points daily. This will dramatically benefit Mill Park's significant population growth. This infrastructure makeover on one of our

major roads has indeed been a project that has been warmly welcomed by my community. The project aims to make the traffic flow more efficient, allowing Victorians to get to school, work and home — to their families — safely and in time for dinner.

Specifically, five major intersections will be revamped, safety barriers will be installed to improve safety for cyclists and drivers, and of course the project will widen the road with a new lane in each direction. Big projects take consideration and time to make sure we get everything right, and this is no different. It is going ahead, and that is why we have done extensive consultation to make sure every member of our community knows what is happening every step of the way. The project continues the great track record of our government of considering funding infrastructure projects for the areas that need it the most.

With two other projects around my electorate on the way to being completed it is clear that only a Labor government can deliver for Victorians, and for my community in the north especially. I look forward to seeing stage 2 of this project progressing further down the track. Certainly it is one that will make a significant difference to the people in my electorate. Only Labor governments deliver these projects for people in my community.

High Street, Belmont

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (09:44) — On 24 January the member for South Barwon and I met with many Belmont small businesses following the announcement of the Andrews Labor government that it will fund the imposition of bike lanes through one of Geelong's great local shopping strips and the removal of 70 vital car parking spaces in High Street, Belmont, in the process. The Labor member for Geelong has completely ignored the concerns of these local businesses which, less than a decade ago, invested more than \$200 000 of their own money to create a similar number of desperately needed car parks. Removal of these 70 important car parking spaces will hit these family businesses hard by driving many of their regular customers away to areas where parking is more readily available.

Tyabb Cricket Club

Mr BURGESS — On 13 January I was pleased to attend a function at the Tyabb community hall to celebrate 125 years of the Tyabb Cricket Club. This magnificent achievement recognises the long and proud history of a remarkable club; it was a milestone well worth celebrating.

Hastings electorate visit

Mr BURGESS — It was great to see the state Liberal opposition leader in Frankston on 19 January speaking at a luncheon hosted by the enormously effective Committee for Greater Frankston. He took the opportunity to speak on many topics, including the importance of the development of the port of Hastings and the electrification and duplication of the Stony Point railway line, and to emphasise the Liberal-Nationals commitment to both.

Crib Point fire brigade

Mr BURGESS — I was pleased to be able to join the team at Crib Point fire brigade and other emergency service personnel at their support day at Hastings Bunnings on 20 January. Sincere thanks to Bunnings for their great support for our emergency services workers.

Police in schools program

Mr BURGESS — I was very pleased about this week's announcement that a Guy Liberal government will bring back the police in schools program that was scrapped, as were many under Labor and Christine Nixon.

Janet McCalman

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Planning) (09:45) — I rise to acknowledge an Australia Day award to a great Australian, Professor Janet McCalman, who was awarded the Companion of the Order of Australia — one of only 14 recipients nationally. Janet richly deserves this magnificent award. She is a highly decorated award-winning writer and historian. Professor McCalman was born in Richmond, studied at nearby Methodist Ladies College and penned the renowned account of inner-Melbourne's working-class history, *Struggletown: The Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900–1965*. It is an Australian classic — a story of great Australian determination and courage in the face of monumental challenges. *Struggletown* is really an eye-opener as it is raw and it draws on the lived experiences of residents and ex-residents of Tiger Territory. It is an enduring book. It suggests that Richmond was one of the cradles of the labour movement. The book throws new light on working-class reactions to World War I and the great Labor split of 1955. Richmond also earned notoriety for its temperance hall politics at a municipal level. Congratulations to a great academic, activist and social historian, Professor Janet McCalman.

Australia Day awards

Mr T. SMITH (Kew) (09:47) — I rise to congratulate the following constituents of mine who received orders of Australia on Australia Day: Emeritus Professor David Ames for an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for services to dementia and psychiatry; Mr Jeffrey Whittle for an AO for services to the mining sector and technology; Mr Peter Barker for a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for representing Australia as an interpreter at the highest levels of diplomacy; Mr Jon Hickman for an AM for services to education and heritage; Mr Russell Scott for an AM for services to chemical engineering; Mr David Singleton for an AM for services to the engineering sector; and Mr Ian Rickards for a Medal of the Order of Australia for services to the Australian Air League. I would also like to congratulate Mr Andrew Michelmore, a great personal friend of my family, who was awarded an AO for his contribution to the mining industry, education and rowing.

I also congratulate Mrs Vivienne Harkness, Boroondara Citizen of the Year, for her services to the Boroondara Stroke Support Group; Mr Bernie Smith, the Boroondara Volunteer of the Year, for his work on the North Balwyn Men's Shed in my electorate; and Mrs Anne Brown for her volunteer contribution to Guide Dogs Victoria and Rotary.

North Balwyn Bowls Club

Mr T. SMITH — In the time that I have left, can I congratulate the North Balwyn Bowls Club on their 70th anniversary. They had a wonderful function on Sunday. There were 160 people present. It is a great community club, and the work that they do with senior citizens in particular at that wonderful club is a great benefit to our local community.

Cambodia

Mr LIM (Clarinda) (09:48) — I am saddened to report that attacks on civil society continue in Cambodia. In late January another three prominent civil society members were hit with trumped-up criminal charges. Labor activist, Mr Moeun Tola, independent radio director, Mr Pa Nguong Teang, and political monk, Venerable But Buntenh, are all staunch critics of Cambodia's Prime Minister, Hun Sen. The first two have visited our Parliament and have spoken to many members. The three men are now facing laughable charges for 'breach of trust' — charges which Human Rights Watch's Asia division categorises as 'politically motivated legal harassment'.

The three activists are now in exile and in hiding and join a long list of political dissidents either exiled or imprisoned. More than 20 political prisoners languish behind bars, including the now-dissolved opposition party, members of Parliament, senators, political commentators and human rights defenders.

The justice system under Hun Sen holds similarities to the justice system under Pol Pot. There is no independent judiciary process and no independent arbitrator. The judges, juries and executioners again do the bidding of a mad dictator, Hun Sen. My constituents from the Cambodian Victorian community appeal to the Australian government to take a leading role again in condemning Hun Sen and his increasing authoritarianism. In response to Cambodia's —

The SPEAKER — The member's time has expired.

Latrobe Valley quarries

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (09:50) — In December 2017, by way of an adjournment debate, I requested that the Minister for Resources meet with local Latrobe Valley quarry owners to discuss a number of issues the quarry industry is currently facing. However, this request has fallen on deaf ears. The minister needs to understand that local quarries such as Maryvale Sand & Trading Supplies, Matthews Quarries, Latrobe Valley Blue Metal and Latrobe Valley Sands have a limited life and their futures are at risk right now. Our region has already seen the recent closure of major coal and timber businesses in the Latrobe Valley, causing the loss of hundreds of jobs. It appears the minister is not interested in sustaining the quarry industry either.

John and Norma Bellerby

Mr NORTHE — On a more positive note I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate John and Norma Bellerby for their service to our community. John and Norma will soon enjoy retirement after decades of working and owning businesses in the pharmacy sector in the Latrobe Valley. They have helped literally thousands of customers in times of need and employed so many caring staff over the journey. They are two of the most kind and gentle people one could ever meet, and what a positive difference they have made in our community. Enjoy your retirement, John and Norma.

Latrobe Valley Street Machiners Car Club and Royal Exchange Hotel Cork Club

Mr NORTHE — Last weekend the Latrobe Valley Street Machiners Car Club joined forces with the Royal

Exchange Hotel Cork Club to help raise funds for the Royal Children's Hospital appeal. The car show event was a resounding success with more than 400 vehicles entered in the show and an estimated 3000 people attending. Approximately \$13 000 was raised for such a worthy cause. Congratulations must go to Matt Turnbull and his army of volunteers for their amazing efforts.

Eltham Wildcats Basketball Club

Ms WARD (Eltham) (09:51) — Congratulations to the Eltham Wildcats Basketball Club on another successful Eltham Dandenong Junior Basketball Tournament over the Australia Day weekend. The tournament, which has been going since 1974, this year featured 1354 teams, including two from China, 15 from New Zealand and hundreds from interstate, with girls and boys ranging from under 12 to 21, as well as all-abilities teams involved across the competition. The tournament hosted over 13 000 players and 50 000 spectators across the weekend. This amazing event has grown over the years and it now employs more than 150 local people, with more than 100 of them being under 23.

I thank and congratulate all involved in organising the tournament, especially Jordan Canovan, Connor Matthews, Alicia Vengust, Adam Currie, Jacob Burnham, Ryan Gardiner, Sophie Foote, Sue Cross, Norm Cross, David Hickman, Bianca Ananiev, Shane Palmer, Sharon Halden, Merryn Brown, Peter Meehan, Marcia Velo, Megan Velo, Anthea Cochrane, Des Buchan, Steve Chadd, Leighton Lewis, Darren Anderson, Molly Townsend, Ange and Tony Bearzatto, Lorraine Harris, Carly Stones, David Wightman, Susan Holst, Rachel Gill, Laurie Walker, Rhonda Lewis and Trevor vanden Driesen, as well as a big thankyou to Eltham Wildcats CEO Greg Jeffers.

Matthew O'Brien

Ms WARD — It is with sadness that I inform the house of the passing of a loved local identity, Matt O'Brien, who passed away last week. Matt was a well-known and loved member of the Eltham and Research communities. Sadly he died last week following a short illness. Matt and I were at primary school together. Matt was a very respected member of Eltham Country Fire Authority (CFA), volunteering in his teens and progressing over the years to hold many positions of leadership with the CFA, serving our community for more than 30 years. He also had a long association with Eltham Football Club, the Panthers, playing as a junior and being a long-time member and supporter of the senior club, where he was a staunch friend and mentor to many younger players. He was

known for always having a kind and encouraging word. Vale, Matt.

Powerline Replacement Fund

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (09:53) — The Powerline Replacement Fund program provides financial support to assist with the removal of dangerous private overhead powerlines in high fire-risk areas of Victoria, but inexplicably Labor has excluded Northern Grampians Shire Council from the last round of funding. The Grampians is a known high bushfire-risk area and has experienced a number of significant bushfire events in recent years. Halls Gap itself is full of overhead powerlines. There is absolutely no sound reason for Northern Grampians to be excluded from the latest round of this important fire-risk management program. With the application deadline of 28 February looming, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change must immediately admit she got it wrong and urgently include Northern Grampians as an eligible region to apply for the Powerline Replacement Fund.

Wire rope barriers

Ms KEALY — It is an absolute disgrace that the Minister for Roads and Road Safety has dismissed the valid concerns of country people regarding the poor rollout of wire rope barriers as ‘banjo-playing dingbats’. No wonder our country roads are in such a disgraceful state when this is Labor’s position on the views of country people.

Concerns raised with me include wire rope barriers being built far too close to the road edge, much closer than 4 metres. The Country Fire Authority have raised concerns regarding lengthy stretches of barrier that make it extremely difficult to judge when to stop to deal with a vehicle accident, and the volume of grass to be managed around barriers creates a huge fire risk on road corridors. Truck drivers have raised concerns that they have nowhere to stop to fix a blown tyre for 500 metres, resulting in ruined rims and extremely dangerous driving conditions for these heavy vehicles. Motorcyclists are deeply concerned about the placement of these barriers and the risk of serious injury. These people are not ‘banjo-playing dingbats’.

I also have concerns about the extensive installation of barriers. Transport Accident Commission funding is used to build these barriers, but any damage will have to be funded from the VicRoads roads budget. Taking more funding from country roads —

The SPEAKER — The member’s time has expired.

Peter Gordon

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) (09:55) — He is red, white and blue through and through. He has the generous heart of a broad-chested bulldog and a Churchillian fighting spirit, and now he is being honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia for significant service to the community through support for AFL, health promotion, youth social welfare and the law. Congratulations, Peter Gordon, AM. Peter’s contribution to and passion for Melbourne, Victoria, and especially the people of the western suburbs, is both honourable and inspiring. He certainly deserves a gong. Many will know Peter as the president of the mighty Western Bulldogs Football Club who helped bring the premiership cup back to Footscray after 62 years. I would make him a knight for that alone.

There is no clearer example of his passion and determination to fight for what others would call a lost cause than his successful push to fight back and save the Western Bulldogs from a merger with Fitzroy in 1989. He rallied the community against all odds and raised \$5 million. We could not have done it without his leadership. Peter’s integrity is evident throughout all his pursuits. He is truly a man of the people. Peter spent 30 years fighting for workers at the law firm Slater and Gordon. During that time he spearheaded developments in class action litigation in some of the toughest cases. He once said he wanted to practise law on behalf of the poor.

Throughout his stellar career Peter has always remained grounded, never forgetting where he grew up and always maintaining his dedication to the workers and the people in the mighty west. His support for the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation assisted young people to get educated and get a job. The foundation changes people’s lives. Thank you, Peter, for all that you have done throughout the years. I am sure there is more to come. He is a man that you certainly want on your side and is an extremely worthy recipient of this honour. Go, Dogs!

Energy security

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (09:56) — Much has been made of the horrendous situation that left some 60 000 homes without power in Melbourne recently. The Premier was quoted as saying he would look to compel the distributors to compensate those home owners. Well, here is a shock for Premier Andrews and his ALP administration: this is not just a Melbourne issue. Lengthy power failures are now a regular event in regional Victoria, and my constituents believe they too need to be compensated.

Premier, if you are considering compensating Melburnians who could not turn on their air conditioners, spare a thought for Robert McVean, a dairy farmer near Corryong. In early January he lost power for 20 hours. It was the second outage in less than a month. It meant he could not milk his 180 Jersey cows — not once but three times. Two of those cows died from mastitis, the result of full udders, and another lost a calf. Mr McVean also lost the money he would have received for his milk and is now awaiting a decision on whether Murray Goulburn will reduce his subsequent milk supplies because they were of a lesser quality. Last month he spent \$15 000 on diesel generators for the dairy and family farmhouse to avoid a recurrence. Premier, if you are going to compensate city folk, I would suggest you also look further afield. You would do well to start with Mr McVean and his neighbouring farmers.

Australia Day awards

Mr TILLEY — On another note, congratulations to those recipients of Australia Day awards: Colin Campbell for his service to the wine industry; Bill Baxter, AM; and Frances Walsh for her local service.

Australian Vietnamese Women's Association

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (09:58) — I was delighted to attend the 2018 Year of the Dog Lunar New Year Tet Festival on 30 January, hosted by the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association (AVWA). The AVWA is a community group that does fantastic work in the Vietnamese community by providing social support, activity groups, home care package programs, domestic violence prevention, a community visitors scheme, playgroups and sustainable living programs. They also provide training, employment assistance, drug and alcohol and gambling treatment counselling and a prisoner support program for the Vietnamese community.

The AVWA is supported by the Whittlesea and Darebin city councils' community support programs. Although they are based in Springvale, Richmond and Braybrook, this group provides important services all over Melbourne. In fact last June I attended the official opening of their Springvale office, so this year I was pleased that the Lalor Living and Learning Centre in my own electorate was the chosen location for the Tet festival. It was a great celebration. I enjoyed the dance performances and the great talent of those singing traditional spring and love songs.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the AVWA committee, team and volunteers, and in particular the

secretary and CEO, Ms Cam Nguyen, as well as Mr John Thuy, for working hard to put together this fantastic celebration in the seat of Thomastown. The Australian Vietnamese Women's Association do amazing work, and this year they will be celebrating their 35th anniversary. I congratulate them on this great achievement. I would like to wish members of my electorate a happy lunar new year: *chúc mừng năm mới*.

Queen Victoria Market development

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:59) — The Queen Victoria Market is the largest open-air market in the Southern Hemisphere, servicing our city since 1878. As most Victorians would know, the market is a wonderful sensory experience due to its beautiful heritage buildings and excellent traders selling fruit, vegies, fresh food and more. But now, because this Melbourne icon has been allowed to become run-down, the City of Melbourne with the support of the state government have decided to redevelop the site.

I have some serious concerns with this redevelopment, as do many people who have contacted me about it. We do not want the market to turn into just a food court or a place to buy expensive gifts, as has happened to so many markets around the world. We do not want traditional traders pushed out for chain-type stores. We want our market to remain an affordable and lively fresh food market with incredible heritage value.

I would like to thank the Greens councillors on the Melbourne City Council for vastly improving the original plans for the market, but this plan being pushed by the state government and previous Lord Mayor still raises significant concerns. Today I call upon the Minister for Planning and the Premier to explain to Victorians how they will guarantee that any change to the market will not impact negatively on its heritage or its nature as a fresh food market. What we love about this market must be protected. We cannot lose yet another Melbourne icon to the greed of developers or the lack of vision of some of our political leaders.

International Greek Language Day

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (10:00) — With the indulgence of the house, a few words in Greek to recognise that the international day for the Greek language is tomorrow.

Πρόσφατα είχα την χαρά να επισκεφθώ σχολεία όπου διδάσκεται η Ελληνική γλώσσα.

Κάθε εβδομάδα, χιλιάδες παιδιά στη Βικτώρια αφιερώνουν λίγες ώρες για να μάθουν την Ελληνική

γλώσσα. Είναι κάτι που έκανα κι εγώ από παιδί, και αυτό με βοήθησε αρκετά στη ζωή μου.

Συγχαίρω όλους τους δασκάλους, τους γονείς και τους παππούδες και γιαγιάδες που κρατούν ζωντανή την ελληνική γλώσσα στα παιδιά.

Αύριο είναι η Διεθνής Ημέρα της Ελληνικής Γλώσσας.

Υπολογίζεται ότι 150.000 Αγγλικές λέξεις περιέχονται από την Ελληνική γλώσσα. Όλοι γνωρίζουμε τις συνηθισμένες λέξεις όπως: τηλέφωνο, διάλογος, δημοκρατία, αλλά υπάρχουν και χιλιάδες άλλες που είναι λιγότερο γνωστές, όπως: βούτυρο, παθητικός, άγγελος και ηλεκτρικό, για παράδειγμα.

Πρόκειται για μια γλώσσα και έναν πολιτισμό, που έχει διαμορφώσει ένα μεγάλο μέρος της πολιτιστικής μας κληρονομιάς.

Αύριο γιορτάζουμε αυτό το γεγονός.

Τον Δεκέμβριο, ο βουλευτής του Bentleigh και εγώ κάναμε μια επίσκεψη στην Ελλάδα, με δικά μας έξοδα, για να συνοδεύσουμε, τον Πρωθυπουργό της Βικτώριας στο ταξίδι του. Ήταν η πρώτη φορά, μετά από 20 χρόνια, που ο Πρωθυπουργός της Βικτώριας επισκέφθηκε την Ελλάδα.

Όταν ρώτησα τον Πρωθυπουργό της Βικτώριας τί τον εντυπωσίασε περισσότερο σε αυτό το ταξίδι, μου απάντησε, με μια λάμψη στα μάτια του: 'Η επίσκεψη, εκείνο το τυπικό χειμωνιάτικο πρωινό, στην μαγευτική Ακρόπολη θα μου μείνει αξέχαστη'.

Camelot Rise Primary School

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (10:02) — Earlier this week I had the great pleasure of attending a Camelot Rise Primary School morning assembly to present the school leadership badges, including to the school captains, house captains and other school leaders. I congratulate all the school leaders on their important appointments and wish them and their fellow students, school principal Ms Kirrily George, the school staff and the wider school community well for the 2018 year.

Uniting East Burwood

Mr ANGUS — I want to place on record my thanks and congratulations to all the volunteers and staff at Uniting East Burwood (UEB) for another amazing effort in preparing and distributing 170 Christmas hampers to local residents last December. Once again I had the privilege of attending UEB and assisting on hamper distribution day. As always, it was a very impactful experience. All those involved in this annual

project, led by Pam Young and Denise Femino, including donors, volunteers, staff and parishioners, are to be commended on their outstanding work in and for our local community.

Government performance

Mr ANGUS — As we enter the second month of this new year, residents in the Forest Hill district are continuing to feel the financial pressure on household and business budgets as a result of the dreadful policies of the current state government. Whether that is ever-increasing electricity prices as a result of the Hazelwood power station effectively being taxed out of business, whether that is driving gas prices up by restricting supply in Victoria by banning any onshore exploration or whether it is various detrimental consequences for Victorian residents and businesses as a result of the 12 new and increased taxes imposed by this government, all Victorians are feeling the financial pressures created by this financially irresponsible government. The obscene waste exhibited by the Premier when he stopped the much-needed east-west link at a cost to all Victorians of around \$1.3 billion is just one example of this government's gross financial and strategic mismanagement. The outrageous multibillion-dollar financial blowouts so far on various infrastructure projects are symptomatic of a government that is completely financially incompetent.

Level crossing removals

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong) (10:03) — I rise to share with the house some exciting news, and that is that the boom gates at Heatherton Road, Corrigan Road and Chandler Road in Noble Park are all gone. Traffic is flowing, and it will not be long before trains are up and running too. We are currently in the midst of the final intensive works to power up and connect the new and old tracks. Trains will literally be up and running over the road from the middle of this month, and passengers will be able to board trains at the brand-new elevated Noble Park station. The removal of these level crossings will make a huge difference to Noble Park and surrounding communities, revitalising and reconnecting a suburb that has for too long been cut in half by the rail line. What is even better is that we have delivered ahead of schedule.

The contrast with those opposite could not be more stark. They sat on their hands for four years. They did not fund level crossing removals, although they did inherit some projects from previous Labor governments, because we all know only Labor gets things done. The Liberal-National record on public transport infrastructure is limp at best and full of empty

promises. They promised lines for Doncaster, Rowville, Mernda, Melbourne Airport, Avalon Airport and the Melbourne rail link, yet they did not deliver a single kilometre of track.

In contrast we will be on the way to building the Melbourne Metro Tunnel, Victoria's biggest ever public transport project. We are doing this while also building the Mernda rail extension, upgrading the Cranbourne-Pakenham line and completing the partial duplication of the Altona loop. We have also introduced local content requirements, ensuring that the benefits of our state's investment in major projects are maximised for all Victorians. Local content was not even on the radar of those opposite, who snubbed local suppliers and local jobs. This is a wonderful project, and I commend all those who have worked on it.

Woolamai Beach Surf Life Saving Club

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) (10:05) — The Christmas and new year period is always a busy time in the Bass electorate, with many community groups going that extra yard and providing valuable contributions that we all enjoy. Whilst we relaxed and took some time out in one of the better summers in recent years, spare a thought for our brave and dedicated volunteer surf lifesavers, in particular the Woolamai Beach Surf Life Saving Club, which endured a challenging season to say the least.

As I arrived back on the island on Christmas Day the club and our emergency services were in full swing attempting to locate a missing swimmer, presumed drowned. Tragically another life was lost a week later when a man was seen in the water just before 5.00 p.m. at Woolamai Surf Beach, but attempts to rescue him were unsuccessful. He was found dead about 20 minutes later. In a further twist of fate, a man suffered a heart attack and died whilst competing in the Phillip Island Penguin Swim Classic just last weekend.

All of these incidents were attended by the volunteers from the lifesaving club. On each occasion the training and dedication of the volunteers was on display for all to see. I applaud and acknowledge their wonderful efforts. The first two incidents were avoidable. Our surf lifesaving clubs continually raise the issues of water safety, awareness of rips and the importance of swimming between the flags. People just need to listen and heed their advice. There is no such thing as safe water. What we do know is there is safer water, and that is due to our surf lifesavers. For this, I say thank you.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines)

(10:06) — Before calling the minister, the house acknowledges Mr Dimitrios Michalopoulos, the Consul General of Greece for Melbourne, in the gallery. We welcome you.

FIREARMS AMENDMENT BILL 2017

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 20, lines 26 to 32, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert—

“(1) For section 101(1) and (2) of the Principal Act **substitute**—

“(1) A person must not publish or cause to be published an advertisement which advertises that a firearm is offered for sale unless—

- (a) the person is a licensed firearms dealer and the advertisement contains the person's dealers licence number; or
- (b) the advertisement contains a statement that the proposed sale is to be arranged by or through a licensed firearms dealer.

Penalty: 40 penalty units.”.

- (2) For section 101(3) of the Principal Act **substitute**—

“(3) A person must not publish or cause to be published an advertisement which advertises that a firearm is offered for sale unless the advertisement contains—

- (a) the serial number of the firearm; and
- (b) where the firearm is being offered for sale by, or on behalf of, a person who is not a licensed firearms dealer—the firearms licence number of that person.

Penalty: 10 penalty units.”.

- (3) Section 101(5) of the Principal Act is **repealed**.”.

2. Clause 22, page 15, lines 7 and 8, omit “an order under this section” and insert “a firearm prohibition order”.

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Police) (10:08) — I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I take the opportunity to talk to the house about why it is so critical to support these amendments that are contained in this bill. I think it is really important to put

them in context because one of the amendments — the government amendment — is to ensure that the appropriate delegations are really clearly understood in the bill. There was an area in the bill that just created potential for some oversight or some misinterpretation of how the delegations of the Chief Commissioner of Police might work. That was a government amendment, and we have accepted that. That goes to the heart of this bill, which is about really focusing on making sure that Victoria Police have the powers they need to reduce crime and harm in our community.

What we do know is that the people who are subject to this legislation are the people causing the most harm in our community, and that would be organised crime. It is the youth offenders who are part of that, and we have got some serious youth offenders who are sitting under that organised crime category. You have got your bikies, you have got your Middle Eastern crime groups and you have got your persons of interest, particularly those in relation to terrorism. They are the people that are the focus of this bill — the main provisions around the firearm prohibition orders (FPOs), which is subject to one of the amendments that the government has accepted here. Those firearm prohibition orders are absolutely critical for us to ensure that Victoria Police is able to continue to disrupt the activities of organised crime in our community, and disrupt and reduce the harm that organised crime is causing.

We have got to be absolutely clear that these groups are responsible for the overwhelming number of high-harm crimes in our state. They are responsible for gun crime, they are responsible for drug crime, they are responsible for thefts of motor vehicles, they are responsible for aggravated burglaries and they are responsible for encouraging some of our serious youth offenders to participate in and earn income out of stealing, robbing, carjackings, home invasions et cetera. There is absolutely no doubt that this is being driven by these gangs, by this organised crime. Be in absolutely no doubt about it. If you spend any time with the gang squad of Victoria Police and you look at the intelligence and the work that Victoria Police have done in understanding all of this, you can be in absolutely no doubt that there is a link between some of this serious youth offending and organised crime in our state.

We have worked with Victoria Police. We are determined to give them the powers and resources they need to tackle crime. I have said this a number of times, as has the Chief Commissioner of Police: if you look at the crime stats, we have seen a six-year increase in crime except for the 12-month period from September to September, where we saw the first decline in crime

in over a decade. I just want to be clear. I heard the Leader of the Opposition yesterday ranting at Jon Faine, yelling out, ‘15 per cent! 15 per cent! 15 per cent!’ He was clearly not interested in the facts. It is useful as we consider these amendments today to look at what the facts actually are — why we need these changes, why we need these amendments, why we need this bill that is in front of us for consideration. We need it because during the 2011–14 period we saw an increase in offences in Victoria of 21.4 per cent. We saw also in that period an increase in the crime rate of 13.6 per cent.

Interestingly what we now see is that trend coming down. The growth in the number of offences is slowing. Under this government we are actually seeing a decline in the number of offences for the first time. The increase in the crime rate, which under them was 13.6 per cent, is now sitting at 6.7 per cent under us, and it is coming down because Victoria Police have the resources they need to make a dent in the crime rate. This bill before us is absolutely focused on making sure that we can do that even more quickly by stopping that driver of crime, which is organised crime in our state.

People say, ‘Why do we need these amendments? Why do we need to be focused on firearm prohibition orders?’ I want to remind people what these orders do. Our legislation is based on that of New South Wales, although I point out to those opposite, who really tried to weaken this legislation, that we actually have tougher oversight than New South Wales does, both in terms of having IBAC oversight and in terms of having less people able to issue the firearm prohibition orders. We saw in some communities, like western Sydney, an 80 per cent decline in firearms. Across New South Wales there has been a 45 per cent decline since these laws were introduced. That speaks for itself, and it makes clear that these changes we are making are absolutely critical.

It just seems to me to be absolutely incomprehensible why anyone would want to weaken these laws. There were unfortunately attempts to weaken these laws. I am just not sure why anyone would want to make these provisions — I think this was the language — ‘fairer’ for anyone. If you think about it, and I have just made it very clear, these laws are absolutely focused on the worst of the worst criminals in our state, those criminals who are absolutely driving the crime in our state. Organised crime, Middle Eastern gangs, bikies and some of these youth offenders are driving the crime rate in our state. Most significantly they are causing significant harm in our community. I am not sure why on earth anyone would think it is appropriate to make it fairer to protect those groups of people. Unbelievably

the opposition were the ones who were trying to do that, trying to weaken these laws to make it fairer for organised crime in our state — extraordinary. We have had months and months of ‘We’ve got to be tough on crime; we’ve got to give Victoria Police more powers; walk the talk’. But then, after a dinner — was it dinner or lunch?

An honourable member — Dinner.

Ms NEVILLE — After dinner with some expensive wine and a bit of lobster, apparently we can work with organised crime. We can do a bit of a deal over here.

I have spoken in this house before about how organised crime works. I think it probably tells the story of that dinner, actually. They basically seek to corrupt public officials. That is how they get ahead; that is how they are able to continue to survive. They know that if they corrupt those public officials, they will not have the police with the powers they need to do the job they need to do to tackle them. They are money laundering, they are illicit drug manufacturing, they are trafficking firearms, they are sitting down with public officials trying to promise — I do not know whether it is donations or some other assistance, dirt, maybe —

Mr Pakula — They would have talked about rezoning as well.

Ms NEVILLE — Yes, rezoning. You know, a little bit of quid pro quo — and the laws that will absolutely have the biggest impact in disrupting these groups of people, these organised crime figures, were attempted to be blocked, to be weakened, by those opposite. It is incomprehensible to me, and I spent quite a bit of time when we first introduced the bill attempting to provide additional information, genuinely attempting to get bipartisan support on laws that not only I but most importantly Victoria Police thought were absolute game changers, something that they had been wanting to have for years and had not been able to achieve.

I took the time with the shadow minister and with the shadow Attorney-General, providing additional information to them about these issues, and Victoria Police did as well, about the impact that those amendments would have, which was absolutely to weaken the powers of Victoria Police and weaken the effectiveness of these laws. I provided opportunities for them to change their minds. I offered, ‘Let’s not have this as a public debate. Let’s get this done because we know it’s going to work’ — rejected. Again, it was just incomprehensible. I think there are probably two things it goes to. One is, again, that someone is in the pocket

of organised crime; someone in this house is in the pocket of organised crime. Secondly —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the minister is impugning quite disgracefully and dishonestly members of this house in breach of standing order 118. She has not named anybody but she has made a specific allegation that members of this house are in the pockets of organised crime. If the minister wants to make such an outrageous and untrue accusation, she needs to do so by means of substantive motion. I ask you to instruct her to comply with standing orders.

Mr Eren — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Box Hill himself has indicated that there were no names mentioned in the minister’s speech on this bill, so I ask you to rule it out of order, as the minister has not named anybody.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — I do not uphold the point of order at this time. However, members are aware that if they take offence to any matters that are raised by another member, they can seek those particular imputations to be withdrawn if they refer to them directly. I understand the point of order that is raised by the manager of opposition business. While I call on the minister to continue and I do not uphold the point of order, I ask members to reflect on the way in which they conduct their debates in the chamber.

Ms NEVILLE — Thank you, Acting Speaker. We have somebody or people — in fact, the opposition — really putting victims’ needs second and the needs of alleged organised crime figures first. But let us be in no doubt: the FPOs are absolutely focused on organised criminals. There is no doubt about that. This is not about legitimate shooters or licensed firearm dealers. It is not focused on them at all.

Let us have a look at this week. We had the Thornbury gun shop robbery last week. In the end it turned out that 37 guns had been stolen. There is absolutely no question about it. They were stolen, as organised by Middle Eastern crime gangs, no question about it. They were guns that were going to end up in the hands, potentially, of some of our youth offenders and potentially in the hands of some of our other organised crime figures, who would have caused serious, significant harm with those firearms.

As police would advise me, these are exactly the people you would want to have a firearm prohibition order over in order to provide police with the powers to search without a warrant whenever. This is what has

worked in New South Wales. It has worked to disrupt those groups, because all of a sudden a whole lot of other people do not want to hang around with them because they also are subject to a warrantless search if they are with somebody who has a firearm prohibition order. It is about significant jail time, relentless searching and intervention in their lives, and it disrupts their activities. That is how it has worked in New South Wales. You can clearly look at what has happened in New South Wales. It has been focused on that group of people — the Middle Eastern groups, the potential terrorists, the persons of interest, some of the serious youth offenders up there and bike gangs et cetera. It has been used to do that.

As I said — and I am speculating here, because I was not at a particular dinner having lobster — there are particular deals that are being had with particular organised crime figures just to ease the way a bit for their business model, a bit of quid pro quo.

The other part of this, and what I found disturbing while looking at some of the debate around amendments in the upper house, is that those opposite actually do not back the police. They actually do not support them. They do not trust them. Let us have a little look at what was said in the upper house. They wanted to —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! The member for Ripon is out of her place and is being disorderly.

Ms NEVILLE — One of the amendments that was contemplated was the number of people who could issue these — we were limiting it to around 50 to 100. In New South Wales it is 1000.

Mr Pesutto interjected.

Ms NEVILLE — Well, we offered a deal.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms NEVILLE — Sorry, we offered a deal to you, but you turned it down, because you were in the pockets of organised crime. You turned down the deal to reduce it.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! The member for Hawthorn on a point of order, but before he does the member for Warrandyte needs to

give the opportunity for the member for Hawthorn to make his point of order.

Mr Pesutto — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I, my family, my parents and my relatives are very proud of our Italian background. I take great offence at the suggestion from the minister that I am somehow in the pockets of organised crime. I find that disgraceful, and I ask her to withdraw.

Ms NEVILLE — Acting Speaker, I will withdraw that if the member has taken offence. I withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — The minister has withdrawn, and the minister will continue.

Ms NEVILLE — Those opposite do not back our police. Let us have a look at some quotes. The shadow spokesperson for police basically suggested that we have to get the right balance because we cannot trust superintendents with this power. I trust our superintendents. They are the ones who made the arrest the other day. Let us not give the gang squad the powers — that was their suggestion. Do you know why? Because they would actually be effective. The gang squad would be effective. Those opposite clearly do not want to make sure our Victoria Police members are effective in disrupting this crime.

Let us have a look at the comments from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the other place who believes Victoria Police officers, who swear an oath to protect the community, will use FPOs — and I quote — ‘inappropriately and vexatiously against a whole other cohort for inappropriate purposes’. Again, they clearly do not trust the police or back them in, because last time they were in government they cut the Victoria Police budget and they did not give them any of these laws. They go on about law and order, they go on about tougher sentencing — well guess what? Every single time their laws had a get-out clause, and we have seen that. We have got a get-out clause on assaulting a police officer. We are getting on and fixing it.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms NEVILLE — You had a get-out clause, because you do not really support our Victoria Police members — you just do not. A member for Eastern Victoria Region in her contribution was more interested in the cultural enrichment of criminals than community safety. The shadow spokesperson for counterterrorism — sloppy on the firearm legislation — thinks it is legal for anyone to walk down a street openly carrying a loaded firearm. That was from his contribution. It is absolutely clear there are a number of things happening here: again those opposite will not

back our police, they will not give them the powers and they will not give them the resources. They bought some lockers — that was the only increase in funding when they were in government. No new police — zero police — when they were in government.

We have right now 1068 recruits at the academy, and it will be like that each and every year going forward, because we give police the numbers, the resources and the power. So let us look at how they have been able to actually make a dent, a significant dent, in the crime rate in this state for the first time in six years. It was a disgrace — a 21 per cent increase in offences under your time.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms NEVILLE — And we are continuing with the first decline — a 6 per cent decline in the crime rate — the first in a decade, and Victoria Police are continuing their incredible efforts to bring that down. But we have provided them with the gang squad, an intelligence system, mobile technology, custody officers, new special operations group (SOG) members, new equipment, new bomb robots and with a new air wing coming, and we have provided them with more people on the ground — 300 extra out there now on top of the 600 we have funded since we came to government. We are giving them the power and the resources — whether it is in our local communities, whether it is in our highly specialised units or highly specialised equipment — in order to tackle crime.

Let us be in no doubt, and can I just repeat: the biggest driver of crime in this state is absolutely — there is no question about it — organised crime figures. They are driving gun crime, they are driving drug crime, they are driving theft, they are driving youth offending, they are driving aggravated burglaries and home invasions. There is absolutely no doubt about it; they are the people that require and are the target of Victoria Police. Victoria Police have been extremely successful through various operations, but the biggest single, significant power that Victoria Police have wanted and needed to absolutely disrupt this group of people and to absolutely make inroads into this is through the firearm prohibition order. And what do we get from those opposite?

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms NEVILLE — There is absolutely no doubt that those opposite made every attempt to weaken those laws; there is absolutely no question about it. And why?

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms NEVILLE — Let us go back again. It is incomprehensible. I still do not understand why —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! I have reminded members that it is disorderly to interject and that members need to be in their designated place in the chamber if they want to contribute to the debate. I remind members to make their contributions to the debate when they have the call and also from their allocated seat in the house. The minister to continue.

Ms NEVILLE — So again, let us go back. It is incomprehensible to me because there is clear-cut evidence that we need these laws; it is clear-cut that they work. I just thank those members in the upper house who saw sense on these amendments. They saw that this could be a game changer, as the deputy commissioner has said a number of times, in how we respond to and disrupt crime in this state. It will absolutely result in crime coming down even further in this state.

Honourable members interjecting

Ms NEVILLE — For those yelling out, ‘When is it coming in?’ You know what? If you had got your amendments up to have the Magistrates Court do it — firstly, it is not even clear from the solicitor-general whether it is legal — it would have been an absolute nightmare. We have been working with VCAT to get them ready —

Mr Pesutto — So when is the date?

Ms NEVILLE — Victoria Police have said to us that they can absolutely do it no later than three months from this point, and they are working to two months. So as you might understand, people actually might need to be trained, but you know there was a great deal of uncertainty —

Mr Pesutto — So 8 May, is that right?

Ms NEVILLE — I had said early May at the absolute latest.

Mr Pesutto — You said three months. We will hold you to that.

Ms NEVILLE — But I actually asked Victoria Police. They will implement this act, and they are determined to get it in as quickly as possible, because they know the absolute impact of this. If your amendments were to get up, it would not be by this year at all, and we would have had an ineffective bill. Your Liberal Party organised crime friends would have been

able to go away feeling very happy that they could continue to steal guns, they could continue to get away with driving crime in this state in the future, money laundering — all of the above. That is what your amendments were trying to do — make their life a little bit easier, a little bit fairer. We need to make it a little bit fairer for those involved in organised crime — the mobsters, basically. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about being tough on crime, I think this is clear evidence that he does not care at all. This law and order issue is not about bringing down the incidence of or really significantly changing harm in our community. It is just him trying to create headlines and mislead communities. He was yelling out at Jon Faine, ‘Fifteen per cent!’. Maybe he should yell out the 21.4 per cent increase in offences that occurred under the Liberal Party. Seriously, 21.4 per cent!

Do those opposite know why that happens? That happens because you undermine a Chief Commissioner of Police. Even in opposition, last year you criticised our specialist police who went in for the hijacking and you criticised our police who did the Brighton siege — every single one. If you go and speak to the SOG and the safety and emergency response team (SERT), it is clear what they think of those opposite. They do not respect you at all — and nor should they, given the treatment they get and given that you were attempting to make sure that organised crime figures, the ones that the SOG and the SERT put their lives at risk to fight, had an easy ride. Again I thank those in the upper house who had the sense and the commitment to make sure that police had the powers they needed, because they are the ones who care about fighting crime in this state and reducing harm in this state.

I want to thank Victoria Police because they have kept their passion for this legislation. They have pushed hard for it despite those opposite wanting to give an easy ride to mobsters — not just lobster and Grange but a fairer ride on those things that matter, such as easier access to firearms, making it harder for Victoria Police to disrupt those crimes. Luckily their views did not prevail.

I want now to talk briefly about the amendment that we are also accepting from Mr Bourman in the upper house, who moved the amendment. We have agreed to that amendment. It relates to advertising firearms for sale. In this particular bill we had made our own amendment to provide some opening of the door around advertising, and I know we had had a number of conversations about making that even broader. We had opposed it when Mr Bourman originally moved the amendment. There are still some little concerns about it, but we have been in conversation and worked with Victoria Police and we feel confident and they

feel confident that we can make it work and overcome any of the small risks that they thought might be an issue in relation to the theft et cetera of firearms and opening up licensed and legitimate firearm owners to theft because of online advertising. They are committed to working with the shooters community to make sure it is as safe as possible, so we will accept that particular amendment.

Let us now go back and look at some of the facts. Let us look at the period between 2011 and 2014. There were no new police, the police budget was cut and they got rid of people like our forensic specialists, who disrupt drug crime. Maybe there was a bit of organised crime dealing happening then as well. If you have a look at the debates at the time, they were all about how they did not quite trust the police and had to be careful about human rights and have a get-out clause like the assault on our emergency workers get-out clause that they put in their bill, which we are fixing. I think we have fixed a lot of their bills. That was their record.

What have we done? We have given \$3 billion in resources to Victoria Police — to our specialist squads, to our frontline staff and for new equipment. But not only that, at every opportunity we have given them and we are giving them some of the toughest and strongest laws. When they have come to us and said, ‘We need this’, we have supported them. The firearm prohibition order regime is exactly that. We were asked by Victoria Police to deliver this. We committed to deliver it because it is the right thing to do. It will disrupt the most serious criminals in our state. Unlike those opposite, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who is clearly friends with the mobsters out there, clearly doing deals with alleged organised crime figures —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the minister has again dishonestly infringed standing order 118 in making allegations against the Leader of the Opposition. You have already cautioned the minister against doing that. It is a gross infringement of standing orders and the practices of this house as well as being completely untrue, and I ask you to instruct the minister not to infringe standing orders. Furthermore, I invite you to consider whether or not you should require the minister to make an apology for those words in accordance with standing order 120(3).

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Standing order 118, for the information of members, states:

Imputations of improper motives and personal reflections on the Sovereign, the Governor, a judicial officer or members of the Assembly or the Council are disorderly other than by substantive motion.

I uphold the point of order from the manager of opposition business. The minister's time has expired, and I call the manager of opposition business.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) (10:38) — Let me put on record from the outset that the opposition supports the amendments that are before the house, as indeed we have sought all along, contrary to the allegations of the minister, to achieve an effective and workable bill that will help tackle serious and organised crime. The average Victorian citizen, living in fear of gang attacks, home invasions and being bashed when they are out on the street, living with the shutters down in their homes in broad daylight because of their fear of crime and seeing violent crime rates soar during the term of the current government, would be wondering exactly what the Minister for Police was on about, spending as she did almost the entirety of her 30-minute contribution engaging in wild and spurious attacks on the opposition rather than addressing the concerns of Victorians and engaging in constructive dialogue to try to achieve better legislation to better protect Victorians.

What was striking from the minister's contribution is that she seems to be following the old adage that when your own performance is in disarray, when you yourself have failed abysmally to live up to your responsibilities, do not try to fix it, do not try to explain what you have been up to; instead make some series of wild and outrageous allegations against other people in order to distract attention from your own shortcomings. Certainly that seems to have been the approach of the minister in the house today and even more so the approach of the minister, the Premier and the entire government over recent days.

One of the things that was noteworthy about the minister's contribution to the house today was that we did not hear much about delays and the previous allegations that she made, quite outrageously and untruthfully, against the opposition in media conferences — that the opposition had been holding up this bill — and we must wonder why that is. The answer is of course that it has been proven to be a patently untrue allegation, where we have had the minister in the upper house, Ms Tierney, in fact admitting that the bill was not in a position to be brought into immediate operation. Indeed that was confirmed by the Minister for Police in her own remarks today, the minister having gone out previously to tell the community that, one, the opposition is holding up the bill and, two, if they had not been holding up the passage of the bill, then it could be in operation. Both of those allegations have now been demonstrated to be patently untrue.

As Mr Rich-Phillips pointed out in the debate in the Legislative Council, the bill was first introduced into this house on 19 September last year. In this house the government did not bring it on for debate until some three sitting weeks later. Debate did not conclude in this house until 2 November. The bill then sat around in the upper house until the end of November, and then on 30 November we had Ms Tierney, the minister in the upper house, saying that she was hoping that it would be brought into committee consideration later that day. Then, lo and behold, it was not dealt with last year. It was held over to this year. A whole series of other bills were dealt with in its stead.

These allegations that the opposition had been holding up the bill were patently untrue. And then, as I say, we had the minister in the other place having to be drawn step by step into admission that in fact the bill was not ready to come into operation anyway. The *Age* newspaper, amongst others, to their credit picked up on that fact in a report by Noel Towell dated 7 February. I quote:

But despite Ms Neville's claims that the laws, which would allow police to slap gun ownership bans on criminals and their associates, are urgently needed, the government admitted on Tuesday that it would take another eight months to get the system in place.

Mr Pesutto — Eight months! Not three months.

Mr CLARK — Eight months, as the member for Hawthorn interjects. Clearly the government has been incredibly embarrassed about this, and now the minister has pulled out every stop and presumably read the riot act within her department and had some words to Victoria Police so that she can come into this house and say, 'No, no. Don't worry. It will be in operation by the end of May'. For heaven's sake, where was this argument about urgency and the opposition holding up the bill?

The second half of her argument is that the opposition was seeking to weaken the bill, and she seemed to take some objection to reference to the word 'fairness'. What the minister has repeatedly refused to acknowledge is that this is a bill that not only applies to organised crime with illegal guns, but it is also a bill that is going to apply to legitimate, licensed owners of firearms — law-abiding citizens who possess their firearms for legitimate purposes such as hunting or target shooting.

I would have thought the minister would expect and uphold the idea that the law should be fair to law-abiding citizens. By all means throw the book at crooks and organised crime — we are fully supportive

of that. Indeed we have had to drag the government kicking and screaming to strengthen sentencing throughout their term in office, but for heaven's sake, every member of the community should support the law being fair to law-abiding citizens not only for fairness's sake, because if it is not, the law risks being counterproductive by undermining respect for it and compliance with it, even amongst those who want to be law-abiding. So it is quite extraordinary that the minister takes exception to the objective that a law should be fair.

And then she had the nerve to suggest that the amendments that the opposition had put forward were attempts to weaken the law. They were attempts by us to seek to make it operate more effectively to achieve its objectives, and as we made clear all along, we were going to put forward those amendments because we wanted to work with the government and put forward proposals within the Parliament to make this law work more effectively. But if the Parliament did not agree with our amendments, then we would let the bill go through and let the government do its best to achieve the outcomes that it sought to achieve, and we hoped that the bill would do so.

I put that very clearly in summing up the opposition parties' position in the second-reading debate in this house, when I said that we on this side of the house were fully willing to support the government's attempt to implement a workable firearm prohibition order regime but that there were a wide number of concerns and issues that had been legitimately raised about it. I went on to urge government speakers in the debate in this house to address those concerns, and I then went on to say that if the matters remained unresolved at the conclusion of the debate in this house, we were happy to work with the government between the houses to try to resolve matters and come up with amendments, because it is important that we get legislation on a subject such as this as right as possible, both to get unlawful firearms out of the community and try and keep the community safer, and to make sure that the legislation does not have unintended and unfair adverse consequences for legitimate firearm owners.

That is what we have been striving to do all along. We put forward amendments constructively seeking to achieve that result, and yet the minister takes exception to them, misrepresents and impugns them and makes all sorts of disgraceful and untrue imputations against them. As I said at the outset, when ministers and governments start making wild and untrue allegations against others, it is a very strong sign that they are trying to cover up for their own shortcomings, and that is exactly the situation here. We have the minister seeking to put a

gloss on crime figures over recent years and on police numbers over recent years, but when you stand back and look at the facts of the situation it is very clear indeed. Under the previous Labor government there was a dramatic increase in crimes of violence against individuals. There was strong and justified community concern about weak and ineffective sentencing. Those were issues that the coalition government moved to tackle by introducing a range of stronger sentences, abolishing charades such as suspended sentences and deploying a dramatic increase in police numbers. In consequence the surge in violent crime was restrained and police were freed up. That meant more police were made available to start tackling crimes that are not reported but are detected crimes, such as drug offences.

As I think I have observed this house before you do not often get drugs vendors or drug purchasers going along to the police to report the fact that an illegal drug transaction has occurred. To tackle drug offending requires enough police with enough time and resources to go out and detect that offending. When you can make available more police, then more of those offences can be detected and acted upon. That was the trend during the course of the coalition government.

Regrettably after the change of government and the election of the current government, there were a number of crucial failings. The government failed to respond to some very poor decisions by the Court of Appeal that failed to give effect to the laws of this Parliament in accordance with the intentions of the Parliament, and weakened sentencing laws as a result. When courts get it wrong, it is a responsibility of the government to bring legislation to Parliament to reaffirm the intentions of Parliament on behalf the community, to make the position absolutely clear and in this case to strengthen sentencing in the way that was intended. But the government failed to do that, and so there has been a collapse in confidence in and respect for the justice system and sentencing as a result. Crims think they can get away with it, and once that mentality has been allowed to spread in the community, it is very difficult indeed to reverse it. That is what we are struggling with at the moment.

The government has also failed to legislate in a timely and effective manner to tackle emerging deficiencies in the law and emerging crime trends. Probably the bill that we are now dealing with is an example of that. Many aspects of it were urged and proposed by the opposition months before this bill was brought to the house. As we have seen in the course of debate in this place and the other place, there are many questions to be asked about how well and effectively it is going to operate, notwithstanding, of course, that there is a

general recognition now by the government and for a long time by the opposition that the prevalence of illegal firearms in the community is a problem that needs to be tackled.

The third critical area of failure in upholding the justice system and protecting the community under the current government has been the long period of time in which they allowed police numbers to be static. Indeed they allowed them to fall in per capita terms and allowed an absolute reduction in the number of frontline police.

The convergence of those factors — the falling effective numbers of police on the streets and the failure to strengthen the justice system — is what has contributed to an explosion of violent crime and offending now. Notwithstanding that there have been reductions in some classifications of crime in most recent times, violent crime is continuing to increase and indeed the overall level of crime is still substantially higher now than it was when the Andrews government was elected.

This is the truth of the context. This is the situation in which this bill has come before the Parliament and in which it needs to be assessed by this house and indeed by the other house. Anyone who reads the committee stage in the Legislative Council will see that the government was struggling time and time again to answer many of the concerns that were raised about the practical operation of this bill. One can see the issues that were raised by Mr O'Donohue, the shadow Minister for Police; Mr Rich-Phillips, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council; and by Mr Jeff Bourman of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party to realise that there are a lot of aspects of the detail of this bill about which there are legitimate concerns: how well-informed those aspects are and how well-drafted they are. I would have thought it is the role of any Parliament, the role of any opposition and indeed should be the role of government backbenchers to do their utmost to make sure that a bill such as this can work as effectively as possible. That is certainly what we on this side of the house have sought to do. It is regrettable that the government has not engaged constructively to resolve those problems, and so we have a bill that is probably not as good as it could be or as good as it should be. But certainly we do need to tackle the issue of illegal guns in the community, because it has been a growing problem for some time that they are being used by organised crime. We are seeing that in the number of reported incidents.

The bill is, as I said at the outset, one that the opposition parties are happy to see passed. We hope it is going to work effectively, even though we have a number of concerns about it, but it could have been a much better

bill than it is. It is regrettable that the government has failed to engage to make the improvements that are necessary and instead has resorted to a series of wild and spurious attacks on the opposition. I would have thought in a climate where many members of the community are living in justified fear of organised crime that, instead of attacking the opposition, the government would be working with us, working with the entire Parliament to do what needs to be done to better protect the community.

Nonetheless, the bill is as it is. It needs to be brought into operation as soon as possible. Police need to be able to use the powers that are being given to them as soon as possible. For that reason, we support the Council amendments that are before the house. We will certainly be watching this bill and looking for opportunities to make further improvements to it, but we do indeed hope that Victoria Police will be able to make use of those powers to help stem the flood of illegal guns within our community.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (10:55) — It should be of no surprise to anyone on this side of the house or indeed to Victorians more broadly that the opposition is today in this Parliament trying to do all they can to weaken the powers of Victoria Police in their fight against organised crime. Of course this is no surprise to us on this side of the house because this is a party — let us not forget, on the other side, the Liberal Party of Victoria — whose leader had dinner with a known organised crime figure. This is a party that has no credibility on this issue. Their leader, the Leader of the Opposition — lobster with a mobster down at the Lobster Cave — had dinner at the expense of known crime figures. As the Attorney-General noted, this is a person who is not allowed on any of our racecourses here in Victoria.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines) — Order! I call the member's attention to the fact that while there has been some latitude given to the lead speaker, the minister and obviously the manager of opposition business in relation to the Firearms Amendment Bill 2017, it is required of members who wish to contribute to this debate to confine their comments and their contributions to the amendments before the house that have been circulated to members. We are not re-running the second-reading debate now. I remind members to limit their comments and their contributions to the amendments to the Firearms Amendment Bill before the house.

Ms THOMAS — Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. I think it is important to note that the amendments being proposed by those on the other side

seek to restrict the powers of the Chief Commissioner of Police to delegate the ability to make firearm prohibition orders to only deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners. This is a ridiculous amendment. What is it that those on the other side have against commanders or superintendents? Why should they not also have this power? Because on this of the house we are serious in our commitment to tackle organised crime. We know that those on the other side are much less so.

You have spoken to me, Acting Speaker, so I will refrain from further talking about the relationships that those on the other side of the house have with organised crime in this state. But let me say this: this is a government that is putting more than 3000 police on our streets. This is a government that gives its absolute support to the work of our chief commissioner, Graham Ashton. This is in great contrast again to those on the other side who take every opportunity they can to attack Victoria Police. We have seen it time and time again.

We saw it only last year when, despite Victoria Police very calmly and assuredly making sure that people were safely off an aeroplane where there had been a bomb threat, their actions were ridiculed by the opposition leader for doing that. We saw that under the previous government, where the undermining of the chief commissioner was outrageous and was happening out of the Minister for Police's office with the adviser Tristan Weston, and the member for Benambra of course was implicated in all of that.

This is a government that is very keen to do all that it can to make sure that Victoria Police have all the powers that they need — not just the powers but also that they have police on the street. As the Premier noted yesterday, head out to the police academy. It is a place I have been to many times. It is chock-a-block. It is full of recruits, and it is fantastic to see some of the very best people in Victoria putting their hands up to join Victoria Police.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Fire services

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) (11:01) — My question is to the Premier. Premier, more than 600 days ago you said there was a crisis in the fire services that had to end and you had ended it. Six hundred days later not only is it ongoing, not only have you lost decades of fire experience, not only have you disrespected

60 000 volunteers, you have even managed to have the union campaign against your proposals. Premier, with everyone from volunteers to management to boards and now to even the union all against you, how do you intend to fix the crisis in our fire services that you said you had fixed 600 days ago?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the members for Bass, South-West Coast and the Deputy Premier to cease shouting across the chamber or they will be removed from the chamber.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) (11:02) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. In answer to his question, the first thing I can assure him is we will not be cutting \$66 million out of our fire services. We will leave that —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members in this place need to be able to hear the answers being provided. That level of shouting does not allow us to hear the answer being provided by the Premier. I will remove members without warning from the chamber if they shout across the chamber.

Mr ANDREWS — As I was saying, Speaker, we will not be cutting funding for our fire services. We will not be denying —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER (11:03) — The member for Bass will leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour. He has already been warned.

Honourable member for Bass withdrew from chamber.

Mr ANDREWS — We will not be denying that there is a clear link between some forms of cancer and firefighting. We will not be ignoring —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — The member for Essendon is warned.

Mr ANDREWS — the completely unacceptable risk posed by the Fiskville training centre or any other like it. We will instead continue to invest in equipment and recruitment and support for brigades, volunteer as well as career staff. An enterprise bargaining agreement has been approved by the board. It is going to go out for

a vote. I recommend all paid firefighters support this agreement, because it is one that is worthy of support.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast has already been warned. I will not warn her again.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) (11:04) — Premier, it has been crisis to crisis under your administration of our fire services: two CEOs gone, the Country Fire Authority (CFA) board, the CFA CEO, the CFA and Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) chief fire officers, the CFA and MFB deputy chiefs, the acting MFB chief, the MFB president, the acting MFB CEO and, bizarrely, even the firefighters union has now turned against you as well. Isn't this proof that you and James Merlino are utterly incapable of fixing the fire services fiasco you created and it is now time to bring back Jane Garrett to fix it?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER (11:05) — The member for South-West Coast will leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour. The Leader of the House will assist the running of the house.

Honourable member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER — I warn the Leader of the Opposition to use correct titles. I will not hear further questions where members' correct titles are not used.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) (11:05) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. That seems to be the best he has got. The answer to your question is no. Those opposite have found their voice on these matters. They did not shout in cabinet or in the party room when their government cut resources for firefighters. They had nothing to say then.

We support our firefighters to do the job that they are so well trained for and that we are so grateful they do. We do not play these sorts of political games. Frankly, I thought you could do better. Having had a whole summer to write these questions, that is the best you can do?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The members for Hastings and Hawthorn are both warned, as is the member for Footscray.

Ministers statements: health funding

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) (11:06) — I am delighted to be able to update the house on the fact that there will be a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting tomorrow, and we will attend both —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — And you will not be at it, so that is good news for everybody who will be, I expect. We will be at the COAG meeting to deal with a number of important matters — first of all, the update on the Closing the Gap process with Indigenous Victorians and indeed Indigenous Australians. That is a very important commitment and a very important part of our national reform and national meeting of all governments across Australia.

There will be other matters: early childhood education, where the commonwealth government have extended funding for a year, but only a year, which is nowhere near good enough, I would say. But the main issue that will probably be the focus of our attention and indeed debate and argument I expect is the fact that the commonwealth government are intent on consolidating the cuts that Tony Abbott made to our hospitals and locking in a deal that takes \$2.1 billion out of the hands of our doctors and nurses, compromising care —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER (11:07) — Order! The members for Essendon and Geelong will leave the chamber. I will not have members using props in the chamber. I know that there were more members holding props up.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Without the assistance of members opposite. I will not have members shouting across the chamber when I am on my feet. I warn members not to use props in this place. Those members will leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Honourable members for Essendon and Geelong withdrew from chamber.

Mr ANDREWS — Essentially a deal that cuts \$2.1 billion out of Victorian hospitals will not be supported by Victoria's Labor government. There may be others who would support such an arrangement, but not this government.

On the issue of health funding, though, it is hardly surprising that the Prime Minister would put forward a plan that grossly underfunds our health system when he

will not even make the payments that are ours and owed to Victorian patients under the current agreement. There is a pattern here. Conservatives at every level of government always refuse to fund health properly. They always cut health funding, and what does that mean? They always hurt patients. That is what health cuts do, and we will always stand up against them.

Fire services

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (11:09) — My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Your solution to the turmoil you have created in our fire services is a bill stuck in the Legislative Council that nobody supports plus an enterprise bargaining agreement the United Firefighters Union now rejects. Your government has had three years to get it sorted and has failed comprehensively. Minister, what do you intend to do now?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Macedon.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) (11:10) — I thank the member for Gembrook for his question asking me what I will do now. I tell you what: the day after the Black Saturday anniversary, has the member for Gembrook apologised to career firefighters? I will tell you what I will do now: we will be investing in our fire services, but we will not be going to war with our firefighters. We will not be denying presumptive rights like those opposite — they did it for four years.

Let me go through a list. In October last year we announced an additional \$60 million for our fire services — that is a bit better than cutting \$66 million — \$11.6 million for volunteer training and capability, \$11 million additional for upgrades to Country Fire Authority (CFA) infrastructure, a \$10 million grants program and \$2 million for volunteer recruitment and retention focused on diversity. Just last week we released a recruitment campaign, the first time ever that the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and the CFA have worked together, and front and centre of that recruitment campaign is a campaign to recruit additional female career firefighters, because we are not waiting for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. We are not waiting —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — The member for Malvern! The member for Hawthorn has already been warned.

Mr MERLINO — We have made a commitment to quadruple the number of female career firefighters in our services. We have made a commitment to increase to well over 900 the number of women in brigade leadership roles, a commitment that the National Party oppose, to their discredit. They oppose having more women in brigade leadership roles. We will continue to support our fire services. We will not lie to them about Black Saturday. An agreement has been reached between the MFB and the union. There are some matters being resolved in the Fair Work Commission. Once that has happened it will be rolled out to a vote of the workforce.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the member for Gembrook to ask a supplementary question I do warn the member for Narre Warren South, the member for Frankston, the member for Kew and the member for Nepean.

Supplementary question

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (11:13) — After all the turmoil, the multiple sackings and resignations of staff and boards, the bullying out of a minister, the disrespect to volunteers, the threats and intimidation and, unbelievably, paying a \$3000 sign-on bonus before the enterprise bargaining agreement was signed, this pathetic soap opera that has so distracted your government and the fire services is still going on. Minister, is it not true after all this, and now with even the union opposing you, that you are now back at square one?

Honourable members interjecting.

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

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Emergency Services) (11:14) — I thank the member for Gembrook for his statement. One thing you can be sure of: out of all the bile that we hear from the opposition, you never hear these —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to assist with the running of the house.

Mr MERLINO — Out of all the bile that we hear out of the opposition, there are two words you never hear: community safety. They do not care that there are communities that are not as protected as they should be. Our fire services reforms —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Ms Staley — On a point of order, Speaker, the Deputy Premier is debating the question. I ask you to bring him back to answering it.

The SPEAKER — I do not uphold the point of order. It was a very broad question. The minister to come back to answering the question.

Mr MERLINO — They do not care that there are some parts of Victoria —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Yan Yean is warned.

Mr Watt — On a point of order, Speaker, I understand you have not upheld that point of order, but the fact that the minister is actually attacking the opposition is not within the standing orders and he clearly should actually answer the question rather than cast aspersions on members of the opposition.

The SPEAKER — I thank the member for Burwood for that guidance. I did ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

Mr MERLINO — There are parts of Melbourne and Victoria that do not receive the service that they should, where volunteers do not receive the support that they should. Our fire services reforms are about improving community safety, and it is about time those opposite got —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has completed his answer.

Ministers statements: health funding

Ms HENNESSY (Minister for Health) (11:16) — I rise to update the house about the billions of dollars that the Turnbull government is short-changing Victorian hospitals. These funds actually fund direct services that our hospitals provide. They impact on things like dialysis, hip replacements and chemotherapy. They impact how many nurses and doctors health services are able to employ, so the impact of these cuts is absolutely real. But the Turnbull government are refusing to pay their bills.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — The member for Forest Hill! The member for Mount Waverley!

Ms HENNESSY — The Turnbull government owe Victoria \$104 million for hospital services provided in 2015–16, and still in 2018 we are waiting for our money. This does not really augur well for constructive negotiations for a new health care funding agreement, but notwithstanding that what the federal government have done is they have lobbed up a draft agreement that is absolutely inadequate and insulting to the needs of the Victorian community. This deal proposes once again that hospital funding is cut and that Victorians are duded and short-changed. It will effectively mean that Victorians miss out on \$113.5 million per year, and that would be \$2.1 billion over the five-year life of the agreement.

Our position is very simple. We stand up for Victorians and their healthcare needs. We stand up for investment in health. We understand that there are growing costs and needs in our healthcare needs, simply because of the fact that we have got things like a growing population, an ageing population, chronic disease, fantastic medical research that opens up wonderful new treatments and technological advances, and a system that can perform and deliver the best clinical outcomes for Victorian patients. But once again we see the Liberal-Nationals in Canberra retreating to form and cutting healthcare funding, with not one word from the state opposition about the need for greater investment in our healthcare system. We will stand up for Victorians while they do not.

Energy security

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:18) — My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. In just 12 months Victorian wholesale electricity costs have doubled from \$62 per megawatt hour in January last year to \$133 last month. This is in stark contrast to falls in New South Wales and Queensland to around \$75. Minister, if everything is going to plan, why have electricity costs doubled under your watch while they have fallen in other states such as New South Wales and Queensland?

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change) (11:19) — I thank the member for their question. Their assumptions are absolutely and totally wrong. They do not understand that the consequences of their actions when they were last in government, privatising all of our assets and handing them over with a nice ribbon on top at a fire sale rate, has led to a —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will resume her seat.

Mr Southwick — On a point of order, Speaker, the question was very clear. It is not about what happened decades ago; it is what is happening right now. What is the minister doing about these costs that have doubled under her watch in 12 months — not a few years ago but in 12 months? What is the minister doing about it? Seriously, answer the question. This is a joke. This is your responsibility, not the former government's — your responsibility. Fix it.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the Attorney-General on the point of order, I have already warned the member for Narre Warren South, and I take this opportunity to warn the member for Ringwood.

Mr Pakula — On the point of order, Speaker, the member does not have the opportunity on the point of order to change the question. The question was not 'What was the minister doing about it?'; the question was 'Why?'. The minister is giving historical context about the national energy market. When the question is 'Why?', she is more than entitled to do that. If he wanted to ask, 'What is the minister doing about it?', he should have asked that question, but he did not.

Mr Hodgett — On the point of order, Speaker, the question was not about what the minister is doing about it. The question was about why costs have doubled under her watch when they have fallen in other states, so I ask you to uphold the point of order and bring the minister back to answering the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The question was on why costs have apparently doubled, and I ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

Ms D'AMBROSIO — Thank you very much, Speaker. The fact is that those opposite are totally irrelevant. They do not really care about rising energy prices for Victorians. We do. That is why we have got a clear plan. They will not stand up to Malcolm Turnbull, who has allowed gas to be exported for the benefit of global markets, at the expense of our own consumers domestically. Our plan is clear. More supply —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — The member for Hastings is warned!

Ms D'AMBROSIO — That is our policy — to grow more generation supply for our state through a Victorian renewable energy target.

Mr Hodgett interjected.

The SPEAKER — The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is warned!

Ms D'AMBROSIO — This is precisely the solution that those people are opposed to. They are irrelevant. They have no plan. Their plan is simply to stand by and do nothing whilst energy prices go up. Our plan is quite clear: grow more generation supply for our state —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will resume her seat. The member for Gembrook!

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now proceeding to debate the question. I ask you to bring her back to answering it.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has concluded her answer.

Supplementary question

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:22) — A growing number of Tasmanians are calling for the state to break away from the national energy market, and even the Tasmanian leader said:

We recognise that Tasmanians aren't getting a good deal being linked to Victorian wholesale prices ...

With Victoria now relying on other states such as Tasmania to keep the lights on, Minister, what plans do you have to maintain energy security if Tasmania pulls out of the national energy market?

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change) (11:23) — I thank the member for the supplementary question. This is a hypothetical by those opposite. Does this mean that they actually want to do that — that they want to cut us off from the national market? The point is this: the national market was established after massive privatisation across all of the states. In particular, first running off there was Victoria, selling off its assets —

Mr Southwick — On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question. This is not about us wanting to cut anyone from the national market. This is the Tasmanian Labor leader, whom the Premier did a fundraiser for only a week or so ago, who said:

We recognise that Tasmanians aren't getting a good deal being linked to Victorian wholesale prices ...

They want to break away from the national energy market. What is this minister going to do to fix the problem?

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Caulfield, when raising a point of order, should only raise the matter that is a point of order and not add further material, but I do uphold his point of order. I ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

Ms D'AMBROSIO — The member of the opposition is totally irrelevant. The fact is this: we have more than sufficient supply in our state to meet all of our needs. The market operator has made that absolutely clear. Our plan is to grow more renewable energy, which will bring down the price of energy for all Victorians. They should get on board, support the jobs and support the Victorian renewable energy target. They have got no plan. They are irrelevant.

Ministers statements: perinatal anxiety and depression

Mr FOLEY (Minister for Mental Health) (11:24) — I rise to update the house on one of the most important areas of the state's 10-year mental health plan — that is, how we as a community respond to perinatal anxiety and depression. Up to one in five expectant or new mothers will experience perinatal anxiety and depression. Every new parent needs to be aware of the serious nature of this mental illness, they need to know that there are services and support for them when and where they need them and they also need to know how to get these services and support quickly.

So it came as a bit of a shock when the national perinatal depression initiative was cut overnight by the Turnbull government and the Abbott government before it. But it comes as no shock that that \$1.6 million cut to these critical services is now embedded in the totally inadequate offer from the commonwealth government that is before the states at the moment. Whether it is families in Barwon, in Sunshine, in Warrnambool or in Wodonga who had programs ripped from under them overnight, these are the kind of programs that the most vulnerable mothers and children should have when they absolutely need them. This saves lives. This program shapes new lives, and it fell as it always does to the Labor government to reverse that cut and to provide those vital services.

I would ask the commonwealth to not embed cuts to these important services in the inadequate health

funding offers to the states. I would plead with the federal government to move beyond the petty politics of health funding and to support these important mental health services. But I will give this guarantee to those health services that have stepped up in partnership with the Victorian Andrews government: we will stick with them, and we will see these services through.

Energy security

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:27) — My question is to the Premier. Premier, the power outages of 28 and 29 January impacted thousands of Victorian households. You declared the next day that you would compel energy companies to pay compensation to these families and businesses. Premier, will compensation be paid to these households and businesses, and how much should they expect to get?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) (11:27) — I do thank the member for Caulfield for his question, and he is right to say that I have made it very clear that it is the position of the government that these energy distribution businesses should do a number of important things: fix those localised faults that caused —

An honourable member — It's not a supply issue.

Mr ANDREWS — Well, if one was to listen to the Australian Energy Market Operator, as opposed to those opposite, one would know the facts about localised faults, and I will come to some further localised faults in just a moment. They need to be fixed. We have made that very clear to the energy distribution businesses. We have also indicated to them that there are existing policies in place for, in essence, insurance claims and they should be honoured, and that should be done as quickly as possible.

Thirdly, we have also made it clear that, given the extreme nature of this outage, those businesses should go above and beyond the legislated, if you like, or the current and agreed compensation arrangements or support arrangements. That is why at a meeting that the minister and I had with the relevant distribution businesses on Monday this week we made it very, very clear to those businesses that they need to provide support to all affected customers. There will be announcements made in due course as to the nature of that support. I would hope that we would not need to argue about those matters but that instead all of us in this place would be united in our view that very, very profitable businesses should support customers who are impacted by unacceptable local outages. That is something we should all be able to agree on —

Mr Guy — To compel.

Mr ANDREWS — Well, the Leader of the Opposition can play word games.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr ANDREWS — The Leader of the Opposition can be assured that those businesses will pay and give support to every affected customer, consistent with two things: one, the existing framework; and, over and above that existing framework, support that I think is properly owed to affected customers, both households and businesses.

Mr Guy — Tough talk.

Mr ANDREWS — Indeed.

Mr Guy — It's all tough talk.

Mr ANDREWS — Well —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS — The Leader of the Opposition, really. Unhappy with the answer? Well, you were not at the meeting, Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier to ignore interjections.

Mr ANDREWS — All those affected ought to be supported, and they will be.

Supplementary question

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:30) — There have been guaranteed service level payments in place for some time that specify compensation of only \$80 or so for a customer who is left without power for up to 20 hours. This is despite some businesses losing thousands of dollars in stock and many losing everything in their fridges and freezers. Premier, when you told Victorians that you would force energy companies to pay compensation, was \$80 all you were talking about?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) (11:31) — Clearly the shadow minister was not listening. No, not at all. There is an existing framework, and what I am indicating to the member for Caulfield is that following discussions that the government has had with the relevant businesses, over and above their existing obligations —

Mr Guy — How much?

Mr ANDREWS — Well, an announcement will be made.

Mr Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr ANDREWS — An announcement will be made in due course, and those opposite will be in no way connected to those payments because, as the greatest fans of privatisation going round — and as those who are not in government — they will be completely irrelevant to those payments and that support. If businesses agree to pay over and above their obligations, then there will be no need to compel them. There will be no need to compel them if they make payments over and above their obligations, and I expect they will.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, I refer to sessional order 9 and your capacity to require a written response to be provided when an answer is non-responsive. The Premier in the substantive question was asked: when will compensation be paid to these households and how much will they get? The Premier has had two opportunities to answer that. All he has said is: in due course some announcement will be made and no commitment has been given as to how much extra they will be paid. So I ask you to rule that the Premier's answer to the substantive question was non-responsive and require him to provide a written answer.

The SPEAKER — I will consider that matter and report back to the house.

Ministers statements: federal budget

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) (11:33) — I would like to update the house on the work that this government is doing to insulate Victorians from the greatest risk to our health system: the federal Liberal-National government and their acolytes and apologists.

Victoria is the fastest growing state in the nation, meaning that we have increasing demand on our health services. It is why we are making a record investment in health and in our ambulance system as well, of course. Those opposite really sat on their hands for four years and did nothing. Our great state has subsidised the commonwealth each and every year since Federation. We are the only state in the nation that can make that claim. Yet again, of course, Malcolm Turnbull has found another way to short-change Victorians and eclipse Billy McMahon's ineptitude. Malcolm Turnbull may not be much, but at least he is consistent as he again tries to palm off his government's responsibilities to the states and to cut vital services.

While we roll out the largest infrastructure investment this state has ever seen, Malcolm Turnbull allocates just 9 per cent of federal funding to the state of Victoria. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister of Sydney gives his home state a whopping 45 per cent. Sartre once said, 'Every word has consequences. Every silence, too' — and it is the silence from those opposite, the obsequious shadows that they are, as the Prime Minister targets vulnerable Victorians, that speaks volumes.

If the federal government worked half as hard at doing their job as they did at attacking the vulnerable and taking credit where none is due, they would be as impressive as Malcolm Turnbull's Cayman Islands accounts. Whether it is funding for health, TAFE, schools or tackling the scourge of mental illness, the Liberals know what to cut. They will check your wallet before they check your pulse.

AusNet Services

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (11:35) — My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Can I get the Deputy Premier to move just a bit so I can see and make sure she is listening?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr TILLEY — Minister, why are you doing nothing, why are you doing zero to help almost 300 people, many of them families, in Wodonga and also throughout north-eastern and eastern Victoria who have been unable to move into their new homes since August last year due to union work bans by the Electrical Trades Union targeting AusNet networks in country Victoria?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Mordialloc is warned. The member for Ringwood has already been warned.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change) (11:36) — I thank the member for their question. We always encourage all parties concerned in any industrial dispute to sit down and work through the issues and resolve them so that communities can receive the benefits of the services that are being provided. This case is no different, and certainly we have been encouraging the parties to do just that.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Hawthorn has already been warned.

Ms D'AMBROSIO — We encourage them to do that. Certainly these matters can be very frustrating for some Victorians who are caught up in this. We encourage them to do that. Our services are always available through the industrial relations portfolio and the minister to be able to assist with this matter, and we encourage the parties to sit down and resolve this matter as soon as possible.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Malvern has already been warned. I will not have a minister shouted down while providing an answer.

Supplementary question

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (11:37) — My supplementary question is: Robyn King of Yackandandah now faces the prospect of homelessness with her three school-aged children because of this dispute. Nilesh Singh of Benalla will now have to pay both the mortgage for a house he cannot move into as well as rent on a home that is not large enough for his family, including his 82-year-old father and 76-year-old mother. Minister, can you tell these families and all other families who are suffering from these union work bans: when will you finally do something, when will you finally act to end this dispute and when will their power be connected?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Footscray has already been warned.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change) (11:38) — I thank the member for the supplementary question. It is ironic that those opposite were the ones who actually referred powers to the federal government many years ago to do something that now they are suddenly interested in.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Gembrook and the member for Kew!

Ms D'AMBROSIO — What I advise all Victorians who have emergency or extreme cases of difficulties is that AusNet Services have made it absolutely clear that they will take action to provide assistance to those families who are in emergency —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will resume her seat.

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance of the minister's answer, she was asked very clearly by the member for Benambra: when is she going to do something to end a dispute that has been going on since August? When is the minister for energy going to do something to get these families' power connected? It is not for the minister to talk about any other matters about AusNet; it is about the question which was directed to her about when will she do something.

Ms Allan — On the point of order, Speaker, this issue was raised by the member for Benambra in this place on Tuesday evening to the Minister for Industrial Relations, therefore highlighting the point that these matters are actually outside of the minister for energy's portfolio responsibilities.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER (11:39) — Order! The member for Hastings will leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

Honourable member for Hastings withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the House is entitled to make a point of order.

Ms Allan — It was demonstrated on Tuesday that the member for Benambra thought that this is a matter — and indeed he was right on Tuesday; he may be incorrect today but he was right on Tuesday — that is more relevant to the industrial relations portfolio. Of course, given that when those opposite were in government they referred the industrial relations powers of the state to Canberra, it indeed limits further —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Hawthorn has been warned.

Ms Allan — the ability of the industrial relations minister to intervene in this dispute. It therefore limits the minister —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms Allan — What was that about engaging in abuse? It is a shame we cannot block the Leader of the Opposition in this place.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Kew has been warned.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms Allan — Yes, we should be respectful, shouldn't we?

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms Allan — You cannot handle it. Speaker, I would ask that you rule the point of order out of order, because clearly the member for Benambra's own actions have exposed that he knows he is asking the question to the wrong minister.

Mr Walsh — On the point of order, Speaker, I support the point of order by the Leader of the Opposition. The member for Benambra is very clearly asking questions on behalf of his community because he cares about his community. It is obviously pass the parcel on the other side of the house in that no-one actually wants to do anything —

Ms Thomson interjected.

The SPEAKER (11:41) — The member for Footscray will leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

Honourable member for Footscray withdrew from chamber.

Mr Walsh — about the community that the member for Benambra is asking this question about. I ask you to bring the minister back to actually answering the question that he asked.

The SPEAKER — Order! I think the matter that the Leader of the House raised was a separate issue to the one that was raised in the original point of order by the Leader of the Opposition. The minister had begun to answer the question and certainly answered the first part of the question; therefore I would ask the minister to answer the question. I do think the minister was being responsive to the question, so I do not uphold the original point of order raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms D'AMBROSIO — I would encourage any families in any part of Victoria that may be impacted by this dispute to make contact with AusNet Services, who have absolutely made it clear that they would deal with any emergency services so that Victorians are not adversely affected when they are in an emergency situation.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister to resume her seat.

Mr Southwick — On a point of order, Speaker, this was a clear question about what the minister is doing about this — not what AusNet is doing but what the minister is doing. The minister is responsible — or should be responsible — for turning the lights on and keeping the lights on. Neither seems to be happening at the moment. What is the minister doing for those two families that cannot get connected because the minister abdicates her responsibility?

The SPEAKER — Order! I heard the question. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: Specialisterne Australia

Mr CARROLL (Minister for Industry and Employment) (11:43) — I rise to update the house on how the Andrews government is partnering with the social enterprise sector to deliver jobs for Victorians, in particular jobs for Victorians living with autism spectrum disorder. The evidence is in on the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce. Employees with autism bring exceptional skills to the workplace such as pattern recognition and enhanced memory, and they excel in repetitive tasks.

I want to pay a special tribute to my parliamentary secretary, the member for Eltham, along with the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing and the member for Wendouree, who has had a lived experience with autism, for their advocacy to me as the Minister for Industry and Employment to do something for people with disabilities and to provide pathways for them to live a sustainable life and have the dignity of work.

Last month I was very proud, on behalf of the Andrews government, to announce \$200 000 for social enterprise Specialisterne Australia. Specialisterne has a goal of creating 12 000 career pathways for people with autism by 2025. They have got unique partnerships with the university sector, Hewlett-Packard, SAP, Westpac and now the Andrews Labor government. This funding is very important. It will help people with autism get a job. It will also break down the stigma and misconceptions some people have about autism.

This is not a prop. This is the front page of the *Preston Leader* this week with Ivanhoe man Adam Walton. Adam lives with autism, having been diagnosed almost a decade ago. He has faced many barriers to employment, but now through the work and partnership approach of the Andrews Labor government teaming

up with global enterprises like Specialisterne, Adam is now happily working. He is no longer suffering in silence. His employer is aware of his diagnosis, and he is making sure that he gets the skills to live a sustainable life and make a contribution to his employer and his community.

As Adam says in the article, this is a transformative program that has transformed his life. What we all know on this side of the house is that it is just the type of program those on the other side want to get their hands on and cut. They are all wanting to be the next Edward Scissorhands in the next Parliament with their commission of audit, and that is what they —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister's statement has concluded.

Mr Watt — On a point of order, Speaker, regarding question on notice 13 249 on 16 October —

The SPEAKER — Order! Can I just ask the member to clarify for the house: are these about matters that have already been raised?

Mr Watt — Quite possibly. I know that these questions have not been answered, but I am not exactly sure that any of the ones that I raised in the last two days have actually been answered. But yes, I do specifically have a question for the Minister for Local Government about Australia Day. I do not know whether the minister understands Australia Day has gone, but —

The SPEAKER — Order! The member is entitled to raise a point of order on these matters, but I will not allow the member to disrupt the proceedings of the house by raising these matters in a lengthy way. The member for Burwood has the call.

Mr Watt — Thank you very much. I have a question on notice that is unanswered. It was clearly supposed to be answered by the 16 November. Australia Day has well and truly passed. It was a question about Australia Day to the Minister for Local Government, and she has not answered the question. It is 13 249. I would ask you to get the minister to answer the question. I do acknowledge that earlier today you did tell me that you had instructed ministers to answer, but it is quite clear that not only are they belligerent enough to ignore me but they are also belligerent enough to ignore you as the Speaker.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member not to reflect on the Chair.

Mr Watt — I am not reflecting on you; I am reflecting on ministers who are so belligerent they will not do what you ask.

The SPEAKER — I thank the member for Burwood for his point of order.

Mr Watt — I have a further point of order.

The SPEAKER — One more point of order on these matters? For the assistance of the smooth running of the house I ask the member for Burwood if he has to raise further matters to do so in one point of order.

Mr Watt — I will. I have constituency question 13 593 to the Minister for Planning that is also unanswered. I will read through the plethora of questions and the numbers for your benefit, Speaker, and for the benefit of all of the ministers that have been so belligerent that they do not bother to answer any questions. The questions are: 13 637, 13 640, 13 662, 13 663, 13 665. All of these are on the database now. The reason I am holding my phone is that any person could check the database to see all of the ministers that have not answered. Also, questions 13 664, 13 666, 13 667, 13 668, 13 669, 13 670, 13 671, 13 677. There is someone over there yelling out 'Bingo!' No-one in my electorate is celebrating a win with answers to questions not being given. Also questions 13 673, 13 674, 13 675, 13 676 —

Mr Richardson — You're a joke.

Mr Watt — The member for Mordialloc says that I am a joke, but I tell you what: it is not a joke that these questions are not being answered.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members will not interject.

Mr Watt — Questions 13 672, 13 678, 13 679, 13 680, 13 681, 13 682, 13 683, 13 684, 13 685, 13 686, 13 687, 13 688, 13 689, 13 690 —

Mr Richardson interjected.

Mr Watt — No, I am not very proud of ministers not answering genuine questions that I have asked in this chamber.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Mordialloc will not interject.

Mr Watt — Questions 13 812, 13 834 and 13 835. I apologise if I have taken so long to raise the point of order, but I am not the one that is refusing to answer all of these questions. There are numerous questions and numerous ministers — belligerent ministers who refuse

to answer my questions and refuse to do what you have asked them, Speaker. I know you have asked them because you said so earlier today. I ask that you would follow up with these ministers to get them to answer these very genuine questions that I have asked on behalf of my constituents. I deserve an answer, the Parliament deserves an answer and quite frankly so do you, Speaker.

The SPEAKER — I thank the member for Burwood for his point of order.

Mr R. Smith — On the point of order, Speaker, and in support of the member for Burwood, I refer to the level of disrespect shown by those opposite. The member is only raising matters for his constituency. Further, all the member is asking for is for adherence to the sessional orders that the government itself brought in.

Mr Richardson interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Mordialloc!

Mr R. Smith — Those opposite, including the member for Mordialloc and the member for Williamstown, might think it bizarre that a member would get up here and support his community, speak on behalf of his community and actually advocate for his community, but the member for Burwood is actually doing that. The fact that those opposite think their ministers, their ministers from their own party and government, should be let off the hook in not adhering to these sessional orders that the government themselves put up. Are we are getting to the final year of a very long term and deciding that ministers do not have to worry about this stuff anymore? This is all superfluous, is it? Ministers should do their job. When the member for Burwood is pointing out that ministers should do their job there is ongoing criticism from those opposite. Maybe those opposite do not think their ministers are up to it. I can certainly understand that, and if that is what they think, then they should just say so.

The SPEAKER — I thank the member for Warrandyte for his point of order.

Ms Ryall — On a point of order, Speaker, I raise constituency questions 13 696 and 13 808. The first one was raised on 28 November 2017 and the second on 13 December 2017. Question 13 154 is an adjournment matter that was raised on 21 September 2017. I ask that urgent responses be provided to the constituency questions and certainly to the adjournment matter that was raised in September last year.

The SPEAKER — I thank the member for Ringwood for raising that matter. We will follow up with the relevant ministers.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Ferntree Gully electorate

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (11:52) — (13 955) My constituency question is for the Treasurer. It is in regard to a land tax assessment from one of my constituents who has spoken to me and is gravely concerned about this situation where her land tax assessment when compared from 2015 to 2017 has seen an increase in the land valuation of around 30 per cent, but the increase in land tax that she is having to pay has increased from \$3255 to \$5775, which is a 77 per cent increase. Can the Treasurer provide an answer as to why it is that this constituent's land assessment has seen an increase in the valuation of their property by over 30 per cent, but has seen a land tax payment increase of 77 per cent?

Thomastown electorate

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (11:53) — (13 956) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education regarding the new Edgars Creek Secondary College. My question is: how many students are enrolled at Edgars Creek Secondary College to start the 2018 school year and are more student enrolments expected later this year? Thanks to the Victorian Labor government's 2016–17 state budget the Epping North community was allocated \$12 million to build Edgars Creek college. This was an election commitment and I am proud to be a member of the Labor government that gets things done. This brings state Labor's spend on infrastructure in the safe seat of Thomastown to over \$340 million over the last three and half years, in comparison to the Liberals' paltry \$25 million in four years from 2010 to 2014. The new school will help our community to meet rapidly increasing demand for education infrastructure. I am delighted that the school has recently opened for term one in 2018 under the strong leadership of inaugural principal Joanne Camozzato.

Gippsland East electorate

Mr T. BULL (Gippsland East) (11:54) — (13 957) My constituency question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations. It probably could go to the minister for jobs or energy but I am directing it to the Minister for Industrial Relations. The information I seek is: what is she doing to resolve the industrial dispute between the Electrical Trades Union and AusNet Services which is

impacting on jobs in East Gippsland? At present the stalemate means that there are no connections occurring to any homes. One contractor alone has eight homes between Stratford and Lakes Entrance that are awaiting connection. The majority of the works were requested by November 2017. Normally a connection would take two weeks, but it has blown out much beyond that as a result of this dispute and many of these properties remain without power. This is impacting not only on those businesses directly but also on people moving into their homes and employment. I ask the Minister for Industrial Relations for an update on what she is doing to resolve this matter.

Yuroke electorate

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke) (11:55) — (13 958) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education. What information can the minister provide to update Yuroke residents on the acquisition of land for the future Greenvale north-west primary school? The acquisition of this land was funded in the 2017–18 budget and it will help to address population growth by providing a second public primary school for Greenvale residents. This is in addition to Labor's massive investment in education for Yuroke families, including additional resources for schools; new and upgraded facilities; one new school completed, another underway and two more on the way — in contrast to the lack of investment by the former Liberal government who failed to fund land acquisitions, failed to provide any new schools and left local schools under extreme pressure in this rapidly growing area. I know that Greenvale residents are eager to hear from the minister about how the first steps towards this future facility are progressing, and I look forward to sharing his response with them.

Warrandyte electorate

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) (11:55) — (13 959) My question is to the Minister for Veterans Affairs. Warrandyte RSL has recently alerted me to the need for capital works on a retaining wall on their grounds, which is crumbling away, leaving the area unsafe. Despite the minister's direct and personal assurance to me that he would be able to assist in providing the \$7500 needed to repair the retaining wall, after repeated requests and follow-ups, his office has now refused to provide any support at all. Last year's Anzac Day saw the Warrandyte RSL having to pay to have their war memorial cleaned and restored after mindless vandalism. Now this government is denying them a small amount of funding to deal with some minor works. I am asking the minister to review his department's denial of these funds and ensure these funds are made available so the Warrandyte RSL has a

safe environment for our local diggers in Warrandyte and the broader Warrandyte community to be able to commemorate Anzac Day 2018.

Macedon electorate

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (11:56) — (13 960) My question is for the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy. Minister, how will the Andrews government's new blackspot program support communities in my electorate who have been let down by the Turnbull government's botched mobile blackspot program? Minister, as you well know, Victorians have been comprehensively duded by the Turnbull Liberal government's failed program. In the last round only one location in my electorate, Benloch, was funded and that was after intensive lobbying by me, the local community, federal member Rob Mitchell and of course a visit from federal opposition leader Bill Shorten. This too was after the devastating impact of the Lancefield-Cobaw fires on this small community.

Now that the tower is built, I am disappointed to say it has failed to meet community expectations, with poor to no coverage throughout the area. This is a federal responsibility and one they have botched. While I have written to Telstra seeking an explanation of this situation I am hopeful the Victorian government's own program will address blackspots in a far more effective way.

Northcote electorate

Ms THORPE (Northcote) (11:57) — (13 961) My constituency question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. In October last year the government announced its commitment to making renting fair policy reforms. Since that time many residents have approached me, asking when these changes will happen — for example, the case of the daughter of Dr Jaquie Kelly, who had an asbestos wall in her rental property cut into by a plumber, exposing her and all her possessions to asbestos. This resulted in her daughter becoming homeless and many of her possessions being confiscated for asbestos cleaning. She had little recourse to support and compensation, other than going all the way to VCAT.

My question for the minister is: when will we see the draft bill for the government's making renting fair policy, and will the government make every effort to pass this legislation in this 58th Parliament to make renting fair for the residents of Northcote?

Williamstown electorate

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) (11:58) — (13 962) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and it relates to the critically important West Gate tunnel project. Despite the Liberal-Greens coalition wanting to consign the people of the inner west to years of pain as truck numbers build on local roads, I am extremely pleased that construction has now started on this vital piece of infrastructure. Any project of this size is bound to have some impact on local residents during the construction phase, so my question to the minister is: what disruptions and changes should residents in the Williamstown electorate expect as part of the early works in 2018?

Ripon electorate

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (11:59) — (13 963) My question is to the Minister for Education. Will the minister act urgently to improve the safety of students, staff and parents at Miners Rest Primary School? I have been contacted by the president of the school council, David Harris, and multiple parents in relation to how dangerous Dundas Street is and the lack of parking at the school. Ballarat City Council has repeatedly agreed the traffic conditions are not safe, and on at least three occasions have promised to fix this, but nothing has happened. The Minister for Education is responsible for the safety of government school students, so I am asking if he will act to ensure they are safe.

Dandenong electorate

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong) (12:00) — (13 964) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport, and I ask: when will the landscaping and beautification works underneath the new section of elevated rail in Noble Park be completed? It was wonderful to see the boom gates removed from the three Noble Park level crossings last week, and it is even more exciting that the trains will be running on the new track in a couple of weeks time. The community is understandably looking forward to this, but they are also eager to know when these further landscaping works will be completed so they can enjoy the new parkland and community facilities that have been unlocked through this project.

Mr Katos — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, and it is in regard to the constituency question of the member for Thomastown. I am not arguing whether it is in order or not, but I put similar questions on notice to the Minister for Education with regard to enrolments at schools in the South Barwon electorate and some in the neighbouring electorate of Geelong, and the

minister in his responses point-blank refused to answer them. If the member for Thomastown is going to get a response to the question she asked, then the minister should also be responding to the questions that I asked about enrolments in schools in South Barwon.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Spence) — I was not in the chair when the member for Thomastown asked her question, but I will refer it to the Speaker for his consideration.

FIREARMS AMENDMENT BILL 2017

Council's amendments

Debate resumed.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (12:01) — I just want to reiterate a few points that I made earlier. This government is absolutely committed to fighting organised crime in this state. We are doing that in a number of ways, including of course record investment in Victoria Police and 3000 additional police out on our streets on the front line, and this bill is a very important part of that. We absolutely reject the amendment proposed by those on the other side which seeks to restrict the power of Victoria Police to fight organised crime. As I was saying earlier, those on the other side who dine with members of organised crime want to restrict the power of the Chief Commissioner of Police to delegate the ability to make firearm prohibition orders (FPOs) to only deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners.

The problem with this amendment is quite simple. Their change would mean less timely issue of firearm prohibition orders and reduced effectiveness. It would have an impact on Victoria Police's operating model and their ability to keep the community safe. The reduced delegation would also limit the ability of Victoria Police to issue an FPO when a shooting occurs and parties are known to police but are not assisting. As we know, most of these incidents occur outside business hours and are quickly followed by retaliatory shootings. The proposed amendment would mean that a duty assistant commissioner would have to be rostered on out of hours to issue an FPO in response.

There are very many reasons why the amendment proposed by those on the other side should be rejected. We are rejecting it. We want to introduce strong legislation that is in the interests of keeping Victorians safe, not looking after their mates in organised crime.

Mr D. O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:03) — It is pleasing to rise to speak on the amendments that are actually before the house, not the ones that have already

been dealt with by the Legislative Council. The member for Macedon appears to be a little confused about that fact. What we heard in the debate about the amendments that are before the house, which have come from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party in the other place, and of course the government itself, which told us that this bill was perfect, that everything was fine, was 'You're holding it up and you're such disgraceful people', but they actually have their own amendment to the legislation.

We heard ridiculous rhetoric from the minister on this, typical of a desperate and panicked government when it comes to law and order. This government has obviously lost total control of the law and order debate, and the statements that we heard from the minister and others who have spoken on these amendments today, and also the minister's press release in the last couple of days, just bear that out. I must say the minister's statements and her press statements in the last couple of days do her no credit at all. In fact it is the typical overreach of a government that is panicked on the issue of law and order. As the member for Box Hill pointed out very effectively earlier, it is a total fabrication that the Liberals and Nationals have attempted in any way — or have in fact in any way — delayed this legislation. It was in the upper house, it was being debated and it was adjourned and put off for the entire summer by the government. To somehow suggest that we are holding things up by trying to move a couple of very practical, simple amendments is just absurd, and I think the government stands condemned on it.

Another matter that the member for Box Hill mentioned that I would like to take up — one of our concerns and the concerns that have come to me and to many in The Nationals — is how this law is actually to be applied. It is easy to stand up or to put out a press release that says we are cracking down on criminals, and that is of course what the intention of this legislation is, but the concern from many in the firearms community is that the bill in its original form was so broad and so punitive that it could potentially have been applied to law-abiding firearms owners as well, which was the basis for the amendments that Edward O'Donohue put forward in the upper house, which were simply to reduce the period of the firearm prohibition order from 10 to five years, change the avenue of appeal from VCAT to the Magistrates Court and, importantly, limit the delegation for issuing a firearm prohibition order to assistant commissioners or above to ensure that it simply could not be done by those at a local level, who may or may not have a particular gripe against a particular firearm owner.

As I said, I have been contacted by a number of people about this legislation. Indeed I received a letter only a week or so ago from the Sale branch of Field and Game Australia. The Sale branch is I believe at the moment — it depends on what they are counting — the biggest Field and Game branch in the state. It is locked in a battle with the Melbourne branch, I know, but it has over 1000 members, and they wrote to me urging support for the amendments that went to the upper house. Those amendments, as I said, were fair, simple and straightforward and in no way gut the bill, in no way reduce the impact of this bill, which is about targeting organised crime. They are the concerns of legitimate firearms owners that do need to be addressed through this legislation and that the government has simply ignored, although it sounded from the minister's commentary before about the amendments that are before the house that they have been sort of dragged kicking and screaming into some other related amendments that the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party has put forward.

I just wanted to make a point regarding my concern about kneejerk responses when it comes to firearms. We obviously had a high-profile theft of firearms in Thornbury a week or so ago, and there were calls in the media and from the government. Of course the government saw it as an opportunity to somehow try to belt our side of politics when in fact the two issues are completely unrelated with respect to this legislation. I understand, though, with respect to that theft of handguns, that the alleged perpetrators have been arrested and the guns recovered. That is as it should be. If someone does the wrong thing and breaks the law, making a stronger law does not help unless you have got the resources and the police on the ground to actually make the arrest. The situation as it now stands ensures that those people who committed that crime can be charged, and I am sure they will be.

Of course those on this side are happy to look at any sensible changes that might be proposed with respect to storage of firearms in firearm shops, but only if necessary. I know the establishments in my own electorate have extraordinary levels of security when it comes to storage of their firearms, and I go on further to say, in the vein of warning against kneejerk reactions, I have many hunters and recreational shooters in my electorate, indeed right throughout Gippsland. It is one of the major hunting and shooting locations — that is, whether you are a deer hunter, a duck shooter or a clay target shooter.

As I said, the Sale branch of Field and Game has over 1000 members. In the main, they are law-abiding, decent citizens. They are sick of being subjected to this

anti-gun rhetoric and being lumped in with criminals all the time. Certainly there is no question that criminals get hold of guns illegally, but it is those shooters who are law-abiding citizens, who have licences, who do the right thing and who do the training that are too often, as is the case in the rhetoric coming from the other side of this debate today, lumped in with organised crime, and that is absolutely not fair. So I say by all means strengthen laws on firearms to crack down on the crooks, but I warn the government: be very careful that there are not unintended consequences that impinge unfairly on the rights and activities of law-abiding firearms owners.

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) (12:10) — I rise to support the motion moved by the Minister for Police and to put on the record a few words in support of that. This bill is an extremely important bill. As the minister has previously indicated, this is a bill which will have the effect of taking out of the hands of organised criminals the firearms that they use to do so much damage. It is fantastic that the firearms that were stolen a week or two ago have now been recovered, but it is important that we now give Victoria Police the powers that they need to ensure that in the future organised crime does not have access to those weapons with anywhere near the same ease as they have had in the past.

I listened carefully to parts of the contribution made by the member for Box Hill. The member for Box Hill said, 'The government's characterisation of our efforts and our motives is incorrect. All we are trying to do is make this legislation fair'. It led to some curiosity in my mind because as I have sat here and listened to the opposition over the last three years talk about legislation relating to community safety, never once before this bill have they had any concern for the question of fairness in that legislation. It has never been a factor of anything they have said. When you look at youth justice, for example, they have at every opportunity sought to deride and oppose the government's attempt, for instance, to ensure that young offenders are in education, employment or inside. They would characterise that as being wholly unacceptable — fairness should not be a consideration and a heavy hand should be the only approach and the only consideration. And it applies —

Mr D. O'Brien interjected.

Mr PAKULA — I can see the sensitivity of the National Party on this matter, and well might they be sensitive on this matter. When it comes to bail laws, it is as if they literally no longer believe in the concept of innocent until proven guilty, so absent is any concept of

fairness in the way that they have approached these debates. You could say now as we hear them on sentencing — as they keep trumpeting Trump-style mandatory and consecutive sentencing with 75, 80, 150-year sentences, like we are going to turn into Texas or something — you do not hear any concept of fairness pass their lips, even though we now know from the member for Hawthorn that is not quite so mandatory after all.

All of a sudden when it comes to firearms legislation, when they have all of these other relationships that are important to them — and I am not going to speculate on what those relationships are, but clearly there are relationships, arrangements and deals which are important to them — now they are focused on fairness. When they deny the fact that their proposed amendments would have watered down this bill, those denials really ought to be treated with the greatest scepticism. When you look at the delegation function, they would have reduced from somewhere around 50 to somewhere less than 20 the number of police officers that could have authorised a firearm prohibition order, substantially delaying the issuance of them particularly in circumstances where those orders might be urgent. They wanted to make it easier for those on firearm prohibition orders to get off those orders. They wanted to move the appeal rights away from a jurisdiction where confidentiality and police intelligence can be protected to a jurisdiction where those sorts of protections are not in place.

In a number of respects I think the coalition's claims in relation to this bill ought to be treated with great scepticism. I think they ought to be treated with great scepticism in the same way that their claims around a whole lot of other elements of community safety ought to be treated with great scepticism. Even today member after member of the opposition continues to stand up in this house and talk about the law and order crisis and the growing crime rate. It gives me not pleasure but a degree of satisfaction to be able to inform the house now that at 11.30 a.m. today the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released its recorded crime statistics for offenders 2016–17. Let me provide members of the opposition with a couple of statistics.

Ms McLeish — The facts!

Mr PAKULA — The facts issued by the ABS. Remember the organisation that ran the same-sex marriage plebiscite? They were good enough for that, I say to the member for Gippsland South. The number of offenders per 100 000 were: Queensland 2201, New South Wales 1894, South Australia 3265, the national average 1949 and Victoria 1392. On the number of

youth offenders per 100 000, the national figure was 2330, South Australia 2796, Queensland 2452, New South Wales 2729 and Victoria 1447. So we have had not just —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the Attorney-General has been quoting from a document. In the interests of meeting the concerns of the member for Gippsland South about fullness of citation I would ask that he make that document available to the house.

Mr PAKULA — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I was referring to notes, and I would indicate to the member for Box Hill that these figures were released on the internet at 11.30 a.m. and if the member for Gippsland South has concerns, I am sure he knows how to use a computer.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Spence) — Thank you. The Attorney-General was referring to notes. I ask him to continue.

Mr PAKULA — Thank you, Acting Speaker. I would say it has not just been the state opposition making these sorts of claims, although we heard the Leader of the Opposition in a remarkably unedifying display on ABC radio the other day repeating the words '15 per cent' — it was like the needle had been stuck on a record player — just repeating them over and over. There is a total lack of acknowledgement of the fact that under their government crime rose by 21.4 per cent and never fell at any time in the four years. There is a complete refusal to acknowledge the accuracy of the Crime Statistics Agency's statistics, even though they relied it on every time it suited their political purposes, and now it appears they refuse to accept the statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that were released at 11.30 this morning.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PAKULA — Well, I say to the member for Box Hill that if he wants to see them, I am sure that he is as computer literate as the member for Gippsland South.

Mr D. O'Brien interjected.

Mr PAKULA — I am sure you will. I would now ask those opposite, rather than talking up fear, rather than talking down Victoria, rather than supporting Malcolm Turnbull, Peter Dutton and others when they seek to trash the reputation of our state, to be Victorians first and Liberals second. Do not allow some of these horrendous false impressions to be created. Do not allow some of these scare campaigns to run. Do not allow our small businesses to be damaged, our

reputation to be damaged and our young people to be victimised unnecessarily. Celebrate the fact that Victoria Police have done a great job in getting this situation under control. Celebrate the fact that after six years of crime rising, it has started to decline.

We do not for a moment suggest that the job is anywhere near done, but we do suggest that the trend is in the right direction and the statistics support that. Do what we are doing. Support Victoria Police with the resources that they need and with the powers that they need as outlined in this legislation. Support them to continue to do the great job they are doing in starting to get this issue under control, to protect community safety and enhance it. Do not come into this place trying to water down important laws which are about helping Victoria Police take firearms off our streets and out of the hands of organised crime.

Mr HIBBINS (Prahran) (12:20) — I rise to speak to the amendments made by the Legislative Council to the Firearms Amendment Bill 2017. The Greens support the original bill, particularly the firearm prohibition orders. We certainly strongly support the bill. What we do not support is the amendment put forward by the Shooters and Fishers Party.

To go to the detail of the amendment, essentially the current situation is if someone wishes to advertise their firearm for sale in a newspaper or online, they must go through a dealer, who places that advertisement on their behalf. This amendment, I understand, would remove that requirement on the advertisements of people wishing to sell their firearms. This is problematic for a couple of reasons. One is that it would add to the wider publication of firearm sales, but it also adds to the issue of stolen guns, which are the major source of illegal firearms. I know that there has been some conjecture that that is not the case, and that the source is imported firearms. My understanding is that stolen guns within our state are the major source of illegal firearms. This further adds to that problem by allowing details of the location of those firearms to be published online.

We do not support these amendments. We certainly do not support the watering down of gun laws, and the watering down of this legislation was very disappointing to see. The Liberals and the conservative minor parties, and even the Reason Victoria party, supported this amendment and other amendments to water down these laws. It was certainly very surprising to see it from the Reason party. They are the No Rhyme or Reason party, I would suggest. You just do not know where they are going to land and how they are going to vote. It is very disappointing that they have taken this approach to watering down gun legislation.

We will not be supporting these amendments. It would be our preference for this house to send these amendments back to the Legislative Council and ask those parties to consider their position and support this legislation unwatered-down.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (12:22) — I take great pleasure in joining the debate on the Firearms Amendment Bill 2017 and the amendments in the message that has come back from the other place. I am pleased to add my contribution to this bill, because I was scheduled to speak on it in the second-reading debate before it passed this place originally and I was not able to at the time. I am particularly pleased to join the debate now when we have seen the absolute abject hypocrisy of those opposite, particularly after having heard the interview that the Leader of the Opposition did on the ABC radio program earlier this week where he was in absolute denial about the facts of crime statistics in this state, because the trend downward does not fit with his narrative. It also does not fit with his absolutely and abjectly shameful fear campaign, particularly targeting the outer suburbs and repeating over and over that there are crime issues there. I proudly live in the outer suburbs, and I proudly represent the outer suburbs.

Before the Leader of the Opposition scuttled off to the leafy eastern suburbs, he represented the outer suburbs. He attempted to represent the outer suburbs in this place in 2002, but I am pleased to say that the electorate returned me as a member and not him. He then contested for Northern Metropolitan Region in 2006 and was elected to the other place. I have got to say we heard barely a whisper and there was barely anything that he could concretely say that he ever delivered to the outer suburbs of Melbourne and particularly the fantastic outer suburbs of Melbourne's north when he had the privilege of representing that community for eight years. He was absolutely silent. He seeks by association to decry everyone living in an outer suburban community by putting out the lie that there is an unaddressed crisis of crime in the outer suburbs.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member has had a substantial amount of time to set her context and come to the bill. Instead of doing that, she is now proceeding to infringe standing orders and accuse other members of deliberate dishonesty. I ask you to instruct her to cease doing so and come back to addressing the bill and the amendments before us.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Spence) — I do ask the member to come back to the bill and the amendments.

Ms GREEN — I am pleased to continue. Thank you, Acting Speaker. The member for Box Hill said correctly that I was setting a context. There is a long lead time to the context of where the opposition finds itself in relation to firearms. It is a position of the emperor having no clothes. To be working hand in glove with a criminal element to try and reduce the power of this bill —

Mr Wakeling — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member has been advised by you to return to the bill. I understand she probably does not have a copy of the bill report. Perhaps the member for Williamstown could provide her with a copy of that. I would ask that she return to the bill at hand.

Ms Hutchins — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member was referring to the bill. In fact she said the word ‘bill’ as the point of order was taken. She was giving background, and she was referring to the bill. I think she should continue.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Spence) — I ask the member to continue.

Ms GREEN — I know why those opposite would try to interrupt my contribution on this bill. They should be ashamed that they have sought to water down this bill and that they have sought to curtail this government’s efforts to control the availability of firearms in this community. I want to commend the work of Victoria Police, who are constantly undermined by those opposite, for their hasty arresting and charging of those involved in — and I will not go into detail, but I think everyone is aware — a very public theft of firearms in Melbourne’s northern suburbs in recent weeks. I think Victoria Police need to be absolutely commended on the fact that they speedily made arrests.

To have the member for Box Hill in this place earlier this week casting doubt on the number of arrests that Victoria Police have been making of the perpetrators of crime in this place is a disgrace, and —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Yan Yean has been misrepresenting and misstating what I have said to the Parliament. In the course of doing so she is making improper imputations against me, in breach of standing order 118. I ask you to instruct her to cease making untrue imputations and to return to debating the motion before the house.

Ms GREEN — On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I fail to see how the member for Box Hill could claim that I am making imputations against him when he in fact asked a question in this place that

questioned the number of arrests that have been made by Victoria Police. I was addressing that in relation to this bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ward) — Order! I ask the member to get back to the amendments that are before us so we can continue the debate.

Ms GREEN — There have been house amendments moved by Edward O’Donohue, a member in the other place, and there have also been amendments moved by Mr Bourman, a member of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party in the Council. They propose the removal of the prohibition of the advertising of the sale of firearms by a person other than a licensed firearms dealer. This would allow any person with a firearms licence to advertise their firearms for sale online.

Under the Firearms Act 1996 as it stands a person who wishes to advertise a firearm for sale online or in a newspaper can do so by asking a dealer to place online an advertisement on their behalf. A private individual can place an advertisement in club magazines or commercial shooting sports magazines. The government’s bill, prior to these amendments, stated that individuals would also be able to advertise in any such magazines that are published online. I think this addresses the criticisms made earlier by the member for Gippsland South, who tried to present that this government is opposed to recreational sporting shooters, who are actually very much respected by members on this side of the house. The changes are not addressed to those members at all.

I absolutely support the contribution that the Attorney-General, the government speaker prior to myself, made earlier. He went into great detail about the facts from the Australian Bureau of Statistics about recorded crime offenders in 2016 and 2017, which is comparative data across Australia. It shows that the rate of offences per 100 000 people in Victoria is 1392 — some 500 less than New South Wales and some 900 less than Queensland. It is more than two-thirds less than that of South Australia. In youth offences Victoria has the second lowest rate of offences in this country.

I call on the opposition to get on board. I call on the conservative side of Parliament to stop talking down this great state, to get on board with the changes we are making, to support Victoria Police, to support these reasonable changes and to not support these amendments.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (12:32) — I rise now to make a contribution to the Firearms Amendment Bill 2017, which has come back to this chamber. The

Attorney-General said just a moment ago that this is an extremely important bill, and indeed it is. Setting a bit of context around that, we need to understand firearms. Firearms can be used for good or evil. Very clearly shooting is a legitimate sport. Primary producers and others need to have firearms. Licensed people may be hunters. I have many, many hunters in my electorate. But we also know that firearms can be used for ill-gotten gains. Those involved in organised crime, for example, are often trying to get their hands on illegal firearms and to conceal the ones that they have.

It is very important to understand that the coalition's position through this is to make sure that these amendments that have been introduced do not in any way penalise legitimate firearms users. There needs to be a sense of fairness and understanding, reflecting that there is a legitimate need for people to have and own firearms.

Talking about the amendment that we have before us, I want to paint a little bit of a picture of the commentary during the passage of the bill through this Parliament. I take exception to a couple of points that have been made. Comments have been made by the minister that the coalition was working to slow down this bill and to weaken the amendments. That is entirely untrue. Looking at the introduction of this bill to the Parliament, it was introduced in the Legislative Assembly on 19 September 2017 and second read on 21 September. I think it is important to reflect on the comments that were made by the lead speaker for the opposition, the member for Box Hill. He said, and I quote:

In conclusion, we on this side of the house are fully willing to support the government's attempt to implement a workable firearm prohibition order regime, but there are a wide number of concerns and issues that have legitimately been raised about it.

This bill passed the Assembly without division on 2 November. It was introduced in the Legislative Council on the same day and then debated on 30 November. I wish to quote the shadow Minister for Police, Mr Ed O'Donohue, in the other place. He moved amendments which were going to improve the way the bill operates. In summation he said:

The opposition welcomes any move by the government to strengthen community safety and to tackle the crime issue ... We welcome the appropriate powers being given to Victoria Police, giving them the tools they need to disrupt this type of organised, sophisticated criminal activity.

In no way are we looking or were we looking to weaken this bill.

There were three amendments put forward by the shadow minister, and they came about through

extensive consultation with stakeholders, who raised legitimate and sensible concerns — quite the opposite of what has been peddled, which is that we were trying to water down the bill. We were not at all. We are very firm in our opposition to organised crime and in our support of Victoria Police while at the same time ensuring that there is a sense of fairness for legitimate firearms owners.

On 30 November the minister with carriage of the bill, the Honourable Gayle Tierney, said during the second-reading debate on the bill:

I thank other members for their contributions so far, and I look forward to discussions in committee. I understand that there are a number of amendments from the coalition and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. I am sure that we will work through those matters in a time-effective way.

The bill was ordered to be considered in committee later that day, but the government failed to bring that bill back on for debate and went on to other bills instead. What I find most extraordinary is that the Minister for Police then widely distributed to media outlets a media release on the afternoon of 29 November, which was officially issued on the government's media site the next day, 30 November, saying the opposition was 'trying to water down laws that directly target organised crime'.

This was prior to any debate on the bill and despite concurrent discussions being had with the opposition on proposed amendments, so it seems the right hand did not know what the left hand was doing. Remarkably the government failed to bring back the bill to consideration in detail during the final sitting week, choosing instead to debate other bills, so it was the government's own actions or lack of action that actually held up the bill proceeding in the Legislative Council, no-one else's. They tried to very unfairly shift blame for this to the coalition. While they were working on the one hand, on the other hand, in their ineptitude in choosing not to prioritise this over the bills, they did not bring this forward in November to perhaps deal with this then. We have remained since that time very prepared to conclude the debate, and in fact that is what happened yesterday, which has seen this bill come back to the Assembly today.

The amendments that have been put forward for debate and are supported by the government today are not those put forward by the shadow minister for the coalition opposition in the upper house; in fact the amendment today is one put forward by the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, which the government I think opposed at the time but have now decided for whatever reason to support and bring forward.

Of course the opposition is not opposing this position either — we want to see this bill pass through the Parliament quickly. The amendment is about online advertising so that legitimate persons with firearms licences can actually advertise firearms for sale in magazines or on the internet and do not need to go through a broker or a dealer. With those comments I have sought to clarify our position to members of the government in the Legislative Assembly who are choosing to be blind and believe a particular story when the facts actually show something quite different. We will be supporting this bill going forward today and also remain steadfast in our desire to see that legitimate firearms licence-holders are not penalised in the process.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:40) — It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Firearms Amendment Bill 2017 and the amendments that have been brought back to this place. It was an interesting contribution from the manager of opposition business, the member for Box Hill, when he talked about the opposition wanting to be conciliatory in assisting to strengthen a bill by not playing politics on an issue to try to fix up the bill's operation. Well, wasn't that an extraordinary about-face? Goodness me, the member for Box Hill stating that the opposition wants to work collaboratively to try to strengthen bills, to do the right thing. Has he had an epiphany? I tell you what, he has had an epiphany this week. He said that he now wants to be conciliatory. He is the only one on that side who started 2018 with a bit of enthusiasm about doing the right thing in trying to be conciliatory, but in reality it is an about-face.

This is about toughening some of our weakest laws and giving the police commissioner additional powers, something that is consistent with the Andrews Labor government's approach to tackling crime in our community. It goes to our landmark agreement with Victoria Police on resourcing, providing those 3000 extra police officers. That is an example of providing the resources that are needed, and this is another step in going to the police commissioner, removing the politics and asking, 'How can you better deal with these challenges in our community?'. The amendments put forward by Edward O'Donohue, a member for Eastern Victoria Region in the other place, talk about restricting the chief commissioner's power to delegate the ability to make firearm prohibition orders to only deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners. This flew in the face of what was requested. It would have added additional challenges to the police force and it was opposed by Victoria Police.

Then there is also the lessening of the time frame for a firearm prohibition order from 10 years to five years

and removing the additional right of review at the halfway mark. One has to ask: what is the motivation? Why would anyone attempt to fly in the face of Victoria Police? Is it simply a matter of error? Maybe a shadow minister was given a little bit too much leeway, was doing a little bit more freewheeling, and it was not brought back into the Leader of the Opposition's office. Did they get it wrong? They have got 25 shadow ministers over there. Three took pay cuts — good on them. They are good people with good constituents; good on you. But are those shadow ministers completely out of their depth? Because they have created in the early part of this week a real wedge for the opposition leader. So maybe there is a little bit of a lack of shadow ministerial talent. Maybe there was a lack of execution. Sometimes when you let shadow ministers freewheel you have these consequences.

Or the alternative could be that this was a direction from the opposition leader's office — that this was actual opposition policy to weaken the firearm prohibition orders, to halve that time frame where we restrict people from having access to firearms. We are not talking about a simple licence; we are talking access to firearms, a serious thing that has had bipartisan support in states and territories across the board since that landmark decision for firearm buybacks made by former Prime Minister John Howard. This is a diversion, and this is a serious thing that needs further investigation. Was it up until that point opposition policy to weaken firearm prohibition orders?

If that is the case, then there are some serious questions, but not for the member for Box Hill. He has had to go out today and make a save to fix up the problem or wedge that has been created. The optics of this are really poor for the opposition. If that was policy, it undermines everything that has been talked about in this law and order space. You have the tough-on-crime stance that the Leader of the Opposition is trying to put forward, and then when the Victoria Police chief commissioner puts forward the need for additional powers, the need for these orders to be strengthened, it is then opposed by the opposition.

This is the question to put to the Leader of the Opposition today: was it simply your minister who was freewheeling, who was in error, who put forward these three amendments in error, who freewheeled and got it wrong? If that is the case, the Leader of the Opposition should tell Victorians that that shadow minister should apologise and needs to say they got it wrong. Or — and I think this is more of a question for the Leader of the Opposition to answer today — was his team, was his private office or was he involved in these amendments which greatly undermine the powers that Victoria

Police officers requested? That is the question the Leader of the Opposition needs to answer. You can say that now they are supporting amendments and they have backed away, but that decision-making in that instance is critical because, to get to the point, the optics of this are really bad.

Who are the firearm prohibition orders mainly targeting? What is the overarching source of crime in our state? It is organised crime. With those links, organised crime is a big threat to our state. We have got Victoria Police chasing them down. Victoria Police officers are working night and day to keep our community safe and to smash these organised crime outfits. These firearm prohibition orders ensure that the profits of organised crime are smashed due to these people not being able to have access to those firearms and not being able to put our community at risk. So one has to ask why on earth you would be wanting to put someone at risk? If there is someone who might be subject to a firearm prohibition order, why on earth would you be wanting to give them an early five years? Why would you want to give them five years sooner to have access to a firearm again?

That is the key question for the Leader of the Opposition. Why should those people who have breached those regulations be entitled to a five-year grace period courtesy of the Leader of the Opposition? That is what was afforded in these amendments by his shadow minister, and that is the key question that he has to answer today. Was it him? Was it his private office, his advisers or he as the Leader of the Opposition who proposed this, or did his minister err and overreach? If his minister erred and overreached, then they should be counselled, they should be asked to apologise and they should say to the Victorian people — and be honest with the Victorian people — that they have significantly once again undermined their tough-on-crime stance.

First, it was sitting around the table down the road from my electorate at the Lobster Cave. I have said before that my constituents cannot afford the sparkling water, let alone a bit of the lobster down there. Was it seven, was it 12, was it 24 people? That was the first big hit to the Leader of the Opposition's credibility. He could not count numbers, and now it seems he cannot count years.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the house has been pretty indulgent in allowing the honourable member to range widely, but he is now well and truly off the topic of the motion and the amendments before the house. I ask you to bring him back to debating that motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ward) — I uphold the point of order. Stick to the amendments, please, member for Mordialloc.

Mr RICHARDSON — It goes to credibility, it goes to the intention of those amendments being put forward, and so those are the questions that I am sure, if the press gallery is listening today, should be put to the Leader of the Opposition about the decision-making that went behind these amendments and what briefings occurred. He should counsel his shadow minister or be up-front with the Victorian people that his law-and-order rhetoric is nothing more than show. The amendments that were put forward went directly to undermining what was requested by Victoria Police.

In addition to this bill coming back, I think the minister touched on the fact that a member of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party in the Legislative Council, Jeff Bourman, moved the amendments that relate to the removal of the prohibition on the advertising of sale of firearms by a person other than a licensed firearm dealer and that they will be accepted if they are voted on in the Parliament. It would allow any person with a firearm licence to advertise their firearm when it is offered for sale online, so that is a change that has been made to the bill. It was originally not accepted by the government, but after negotiations it was determined that that kind of amendment is quite minor as opposed to lessening the time that firearm prohibition orders are put on people who should not be entitled to a gun. Again we are not talking about a parking ticket or a minor fine; we are talking about a five-year grace period for people, some of whom could be connected to organised crime, and giving them a five-year free kick to get a firearm. It is extraordinary. I commend the amendments that have been moved. Thank goodness our government did not accept the Leader of the Opposition's amendments.

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (12:50) — I rise briefly to speak to the amendments to the Firearms Amendment Bill 2017 and, in doing so, to put on the record that, as the chamber knows, there have been amendments in the upper house from both the Liberal-National coalition and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. I guess these are the two lots of amendments that I would like to talk about along with the reasons for opposing and not opposing those amendments.

When looking through the amendments that were raised by the Liberal-National parties in the upper house, you wonder if they are really just there to frustrate. They do not want to say, 'The Labor government is doing a good job on these issues and in this space'. They just cannot

quite bring themselves to think that it may be a good piece of legislation that has been proposed by the Andrews Labor government, and therefore they come up with all sorts of things to frustrate, delay or obstruct any sort of legislation that we are trying to put through the Parliament. In this case of course you would think, with all the opposition carry-on about law and order and community safety and how there is not enough of it, that they would be wanting to support Victoria Police in the things they are requesting when it comes to orders for particular people to prevent them having firearms.

But, no, if you look at some of the amendments, it seems that they are really just about not being able to say yes. It is very obvious that the proposals put forward by the government in this legislation are much more practical and contain much more common sense than the amendments moved in the upper house by the Liberal-National coalition.

Under the government's legislation, if there is a dispute or decision that needs to be reviewed, it will go to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, whereas the Liberal-National coalition are arguing that it ought to go to the Magistrates Court. Why would you load more work onto the courts when there is a very practical mechanism already available through VCAT? While it might be argued that this takes a bit of time, VCAT has the mechanisms in place to review and determine issues of this nature in an administrative way, because these are administrative decisions and this is an administrative part of the law that we are considering. It is for the best that it is in the hands of the representatives of VCAT rather than the courts, which are already overworked in terms of their responsibilities.

In our legislation we are proposing that the Chief Commissioner of Police, who has many duties, should be able to delegate the authority to make decisions around who can have firearms or who can be prohibited or prevented from having firearms to other senior members of the police force. The Liberal-National coalition is trying to frustrate and bog down this issue by saying that such a decision ought not to be able to be delegated to other police, even if they are very senior, responsible and capable members of Victoria Police.

These are just a couple of examples that show that for the coalition it is not about genuinely trying to make the legislation better; it is about trying to frustrate the government and make this process more difficult. It seems that for those opposite this is all about politics and nothing to do with people.

There have been delays in this legislation. It could have been gazetted and become law quickly, but if there are amendments and if there is to-ing and fro-ing between the upper and lower houses, this causes all sorts of delays. What will happen if, because this legislation is not in place, an incident occurs in relation to this issue? I am sure the opposition will be the first to jump up and down and say that the Andrews Labor government is at fault and that it ought to be brought to task for that.

In terms of the amendments from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, the Andrews Labor government genuinely wants to consult on this issue with people who are directly affected by it. We are not saying that nobody should have a gun. We genuinely want to consult with people who have a legitimate use for firearms, such as people who like to go hunting. We want to make sure that the legislation is in a workable form and will not make it prohibitively difficult for genuine people who are not a risk to the community and who do have good reasons for owning guns, whether they be farmers or recreational shooters.

The amendments from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party in the upper house seem to be reasonable amendments. At the moment there is a total prohibition on anybody advertising firearms for sale. An amendment from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party allows legitimate owners of firearms, if they no longer have use for a gun or particular guns, to sell those guns. Of course in order to sell a gun you need a buyer and you need to be able to tell people that you have a gun for sale. For example, a person may want to advertise in a gun club magazine or that sort of thing, so in that instance people will know where to go if they are looking for a firearm. These amendments seem very reasonable. Hopefully they will assist people who are genuine owners of guns and who own guns for genuine, lawful and reasonable purposes.

We know that the police have concerns about this issue. They believe that if people advertise a gun, others will see it and the advertiser may be a target of burglary. However, the government is dealing with this issue by making sure there are safeguards in place.

This legislation has gone through the lower house and it is now just a matter of dealing with the upper house amendments, some of which are good and some are bad. Once this legislation has passed it will be an important additional step in making sure that people are safe. We introduced this legislation without prejudice and without any desire to either look after or offend any individual group. You can only wonder whether some of the frustrations with regard to this issue are because of that infamous dinner between the Leader of the Opposition

and people who, according to Victoria Police, were not of good character. This legislation may result in putting in place certain bans and prohibitions when it comes to the places they can go and where they can do their business. These amendments ought to be supported, and I look forward to their passage through the house.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) (12:59) — I am delighted to make a contribution this afternoon on the Legislative Council's amendments to the Firearms Amendment Bill 2017. Members before me have spoken about the flawed thinking behind the amendments that were being pursued by Mr O'Donohue, who is a member in the other place. I do find it curious that the opposition would seek to have a decision in relation to the issuing of a firearms —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ward) — Order! The time has come to break for lunch.

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

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) (14:02) — Before the luncheon break I was indicating why the government is not supportive of those amendments moved by Mr O'Donohue in the other place. I was beginning to talk a bit about the fact that Mr O'Donohue had moved a proposed amendment to the Firearms Amendment Bill that related to the way in which a dispute about a firearm prohibition order should be dealt with. Mr O'Donohue in one of his amendments sought that those sorts of reviews should be performed by the Magistrates Court. This proposed amendment is a quite curious amendment that was being pursued by Mr O'Donohue, and I think it goes to a wider, more systemic problem which I will illustrate further.

There are approximately 51 Magistrates Courts throughout the state of Victoria and there are 46 VCAT locations throughout Victoria. So at one level you could argue that because there is a greater spread, although it is marginal, of Magistrates Courts versus VCAT hearing locations, that provides more opportunity for a firearm prohibition order to be reviewed. However, the reality is that the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal was set up to resolve disputes. It has that regulatory oversight and regulatory review. As members of this place, many of us would know about the role that VCAT plays in adjudicating on planning disputes. The tribunal members of VCAT do this on a daily basis. They have great expertise in the way in which disputes are managed, and more so than those who sit in the Magistrates Courts. I would question why you would ask a magistrate who does not do this on a daily basis to do this when a panel member of VCAT would be better placed to do it.

I am also curious as to why Mr O'Donohue sought to move this amendment, given the fact that it would put additional strain and burden on the Magistrates Courts. It is basically saying to the magistrates of Victoria, 'Look, we know you don't really have a great deal of competency or skill in this particular area, but we are going to ask you to go into this area even though there is another body that is perfectly capable of doing that, and we're going to put even more of a workload on you rather than having you dealing with your bread-and-butter cases'. That is the position put forward by the opposition.

What I find more curious is how this came about. How was this allowed to occur? Mr O'Donohue is a member of the Liberal Party and of shadow cabinet. He would not have unilaterally thought to introduce these sorts of amendments on his own. I can only assume that these matters were canvassed in shadow cabinet. Obviously it is not for me, as a member of the government, to have any insight as to the ongoing internal machinations of shadow cabinet, nor do I wish to have that level of insight. But this does go to the question of what is going on in the shadow cabinet. Was the member for Box Hill, who is a former Attorney-General and the longest serving member of the Legislative Assembly, present when these discussions were occurring? I am not sure if the member for Box Hill would have thought this was a particularly good idea. That would be my sense of it. Obviously he is bound by shadow cabinet solidarity and of course he is in duty bound to support any such decision.

What was the conversation that went on in shadow cabinet when these amendments were canvassed? Did nobody in there think, 'Well, we've got VCAT and VCAT is established to deal with these sorts of negotiations and disputes. Its members have got competency and expertise in administrative law. Let's get them to do that, rather than the magistrates'? It does not appear that those conversations occurred, or if they did occur, they were probably the most cursory conversations. Why were there not conversations about the impact this might have on the workflow of magistrates? Why were there not conversations around whether magistrates have the appropriate skilling and resourcing to be able to do this sort of work?

Obviously the government is not supportive of such a foolish amendment. Those opposite will present themselves as an alternative government. They will go to the voters later this year and profess that they are fit, ready, proper and able to govern this state. When they decide through their own internal processes to put forward an amendment that is so questionable, not only in relation to its impact and effect but the very thought

process that went into putting forward this amendment, it shows that they are clearly not capable of governing this state.

I also note that Mr O'Donohue sought to restrict the Chief Commissioner of Police's ability to make firearm prohibition orders and sought to allow that power to go to only deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners. Again, I find this a very, very curious decision. I would have thought that deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners would have more pressing matters to deal with, frankly, than resolving a dispute over a firearm prohibition order. When you are looking at force command, when you are looking at the broader picture of policing in the 21st century, when you are looking at a police academy that is absolutely full to the brim with recruits — part of the 3135 additional sworn officers that are committed to by this government — when you are looking at the rollout and the implementation of 400 custody officers, when you are looking at trying to find the best ways forward to bringing in modern, 21st century policing, when you are looking at trying to find a more efficient way to administer justice in the state of Victoria, would you really think it is a good idea that the people grappling with the very, very big policy questions of the day in relation to policing should be having to resolve whether a firearm prohibition order should be imposed upon John Smith? Is that really what we are asking force command to do?

Moreover, it does lead to an interesting question. If it is being restricted to deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners, not only do they have a lot on their plate — and I would defer to the advice of my good friend the Minister for Police on this matter — but I would assume that all deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners would be working within the Hoddle grid; that would be my guess. If there is a dispute on a firearm prohibition order, people who have the insight and knowledge on the ground are not going to be there. They are going to be out in the field.

Effectively what Mr O'Donohue was seeking to do was to say, 'You know what? If you're a deputy secretary, we don't think you're an appropriate person to review a firearm prohibition order. If you are a commander, we don't think that you are a fit and proper person to review a firearm prohibition order. If you're a superintendent' — and these are people who might be, for example, operating in a transit and public sector command support position or in crime, intelligence covert support, counterterrorism or family violence — 'we don't think that you are a fit and proper person to determine whether a firearm prohibition order should be in place'.

I will just repeat that for the benefit of those opposite. The opposition have determined that if you are a superintendent involved in and working for the counterterrorism squad in a command position, you are not a fit and proper person to review a decision around a firearm prohibition order. What an extraordinary position that is. It is incomprehensible. It is absolutely incomprehensible. Again, these topics would have been canvassed in the shadow cabinet. At some point somebody should have asked the question, 'If we are restricting the number of people who can review a firearm prohibition order, who are we ruling out?'. It is not like those opposite have been languishing in opposition for 10 years and therefore are unaware and do not know about the way in which a government functions and operates. It was only three years ago that they were in government, yet they somehow are incapable of doing the work and applying themselves in a disciplined, coherent and consistent manner when looking at moving amendments.

Again, I restate: those opposite are saying that a superintendent from counterterrorism is not a fit and proper person to review a firearm prohibition order. What an absolute disgrace. They have no credibility when it comes to community safety in this state, and they will have absolutely no credibility when it comes to occupying the Treasury bench post-November.

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (14:12) — I rise to join in this debate about the amendments. I just want to begin by looking at the amendments that the government will support. Mr Bourman's house amendments propose to do one thing, and that is to remove the prohibition on the advertising of the sale of firearms by a person other than a licensed firearms dealer. It would allow any person with a firearms licence to advertise that their firearm is offered for sale online.

I just want to clarify the reasons behind the government supporting this amendment as I have been advised. Under the Firearms Act 1996 as it stands a person who wishes to advertise a firearm for sale online or in a newspaper can do so by asking a dealer to place an online advertisement on their behalf. A private individual can place an advertisement in a club magazine or commercial shooting sports magazine. The government's bill prior to these amendments states that individuals will also be able to advertise in any such magazines that are published online.

The government opposed Mr Bourman's amendments in the Council on the basis that there are risks associated with allowing detailed information about the location of firearms to be widely posted online. But I

am advised that the government is prepared to support Mr Bourman's amendments in order to get these important reforms through Victoria's Parliament.

Mr Bourman has noted that these amendments will bring Victoria's laws on the advertising of firearms into line with laws in other states and territories. I note his observation that the existing safeguards are in place to ensure that firearms are only sold to licensed individuals and appropriately registered individuals, including the permit to acquire a system, and they require that all sales occur through a dealer. These safeguards will continue to apply following the change. That is an important proposition to make sure that the safeguards are still in place.

The government does not, however, dismiss the concerns raised by Victoria Police about the potential for an increased risk of firearm theft associated with the broader online advertising of gun sales. Victoria Police are concerned that this amendment could lead to people being identified through their personal online advertisements and result in people with firearms being the target of burglary. I know that just in recent times that has been an issue, and I am glad to see that that has been resolved.

The Victorian government will continue to work with Victoria Police to ensure that the licensed firearm community is educated on the risks of advertising online and on how to protect themselves against theft and break-ins when using online services. That is an important further program to make sure that people know and understand what the level of risk is and how to appropriately respond to that. Victoria Police already works to educate licensed users about how to protect themselves against firearm theft, which includes being careful online in how they position themselves. Following these changes the government is confident this proactive community engagement will continue. That is the government's position, as I am advised, on the amendments that will be accepted.

I turn now to the amendments that the government does not support. These were the house amendments moved by Edward O'Donohue in the other place. He was seeking to move the reviewing of the chief commissioner's decision to issue a firearm prohibition order (FPO) from VCAT to the Magistrates Court and then further to restrict the chief commissioner's power to delegate the ability to make a firearm prohibition order. The third point was to reduce the duration of a firearm prohibition order from 10 to five years and remove the additional right of review at the halfway mark of a firearm prohibition order.

To go into a bit more detail on that, what the bill currently provides is that deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners, Victoria Police executives, Victorian public service staff, commanders and select superintendents will be able to make firearm prohibition orders. The house amendments 2 to 4 propose to restrict this to only deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners. Regarding the third amendment proposed by Mr O'Donohue, the bill currently provides for a firearm prohibition order to last for 10 years for an adult and five years for a child.

House amendment 10 moved by the opposition in the other place would make the duration five years for anyone. The bill also provides that after more than half of that time has elapsed the person can reapply to VCAT to review the decision to make the order. In connection with reducing the duration, the amendments would remove this halfway mark review, and that is done in a number of detailed clauses. I will not go into the specifics on that, but that is the key point to be made.

On the review of the chief commissioner's decision to issue a firearm prohibition order from VCAT to the Magistrates Court, VCAT is a more appropriate body than a Magistrates Court to review the decisions to issue FPOs in the government's opinion. VCAT commonly reviews administrative decisions; that is its core function. So this is the proposition here: that this is the more appropriate body to actually address this matter. As a result it has a legislative framework in place which makes clear how reviews will be handled. By contrast the Magistrates Court is rarely provided with the power to review decisions like these and does not have such laws and procedures in place. Were the opposition's amendments to proceed, great uncertainty would be created regarding how such reviews would operate. There would be uncertainty on critical issues, including the type of review, the powers of the court and what evidence it can rely on. So they are the critical points. While the risk to make it constitutionally invalid is low, making the Magistrates Court the Court of Appeal would significantly undermine the functions of the bill. That is the government's response to that proposition.

Another point is that some decisions to be made on an FPO will be based on criminal intelligence, such as the identity of police informants, police methodologies and instructions and information regarding ongoing investigations or the prosecution of an offence. It is not unusual for VCAT to deal with sensitive, confidential or intelligence information across the broad range of application types it deals with, and it is therefore already equipped to review sensitive information in the context of an FPO. That is obviously a sensitive and significant delineation there as well. Such a framework

is not in place for reviews by the Magistrates Court and the house amendments would not create any.

The house amendments would need significant consequential amendments to clarify the nature of the review, the orders the Magistrates Court of Victoria can make, whether the rules of evidence apply and a regime for dealing with confidential information. As it stands under the house amendments, the only way to protect that information would be a special claim which would mean that the decision-maker — that is, the magistrate — would not have access to it. This would mean it is less fair for the applicant than the Crown privilege certificate mechanisms under the VCAT act. VCAT still gets the information. Providing for review by VCAT does not exclude the courts from reviewing FPO decisions. Review decisions by VCAT can be appealed to the Supreme Court, and judicial review is also available. Also, several senior members of VCAT are also judges of the County and Supreme courts.

I hope by providing that level of detail I have been able to explain the differences between the government's position on which amendments it will accept, and why, and which amendments it does not find agreeable. This is an important bill to get passed by the Parliament to help with the overall law and order strategy that the government has. The Minister for Police is at the table. We know about the proposition that there has been \$2 billion invested, there have been 3000 police recruited and there is a whole strategy on how we look at this from a criminal justice level, from a social level and in terms of how Labor is protecting the community. This bill and the amendments that the government supports are critical to that.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 79

Allan, Ms	McLeish, Ms
Angus, Mr	Merlino, Mr
Asher, Ms	Morris, Mr
Battin, Mr	Nardella, Mr
Blackwood, Mr	Neville, Ms
Britnell, Ms	Noonan, Mr
Bull, Mr J.	O'Brien, Mr D.
Bull, Mr T.	O'Brien, Mr M.
Burgess, Mr	Pakula, Mr
Carbines, Mr	Pallas, Mr
Carroll, Mr	Paynter, Mr
Clark, Mr	Pearson, Mr
Couzens, Ms	Perera, Mr
Crisp, Mr	Pesutto, Mr
D'Ambrosio, Ms	Richardson, Mr
Dimopoulos, Mr	Riordan, Mr
Dixon, Mr	Ryall, Ms
Donnellan, Mr	Ryan, Ms
Edbrooke, Mr	Scott, Mr
Eren, Mr	Sheed, Ms
Foley, Mr	Smith, Mr R.

Fyffe, Mrs	Smith, Mr T.
Garrett, Ms	Southwick, Mr
Gidley, Mr	Spence, Ms
Graley, Ms	Staikos, Mr
Green, Ms	Staley, Ms
Guy, Mr	Suleyman, Ms
Halfpenny, Ms	Thomas, Ms
Hennessy, Ms	Thompson, Mr
Hodgett, Mr	Thomson, Ms
Howard, Mr	Tilley, Mr
Hutchins, Ms	Victoria, Ms
Katos, Mr	Wakeling, Mr
Kealy, Ms	Walsh, Mr
Kilkenny, Ms	Ward, Ms
Knight, Ms	Watt, Mr
Languiller, Mr	Wells, Mr
Lim, Mr	Williams, Ms
McCurdy, Mr	Wynne, Mr
McGuire, Mr	

Noes, 3

Hibbins, Mr	Thorpe, Ms
Sandell, Ms	

Motion agreed to.

LABOUR HIRE LICENSING BILL 2017

Second reading

Debate resumed from 7 February; motion of Mr DONNELLAN (Minister for Roads and Road Safety).

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) (14:28) — It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. At the outset I would like to commend the minister for all her hard work and dedication in bringing this landmark bill to the house.

This morning I got up and was having my breakfast — a cup of tea and toast — and found on page 5 of the *Age* an article headed 'Brandis takes parting swipe'. George Brandis, as members may remember, is the man who said that people have the right to be bigots. The *Age* reports that in his parting speech he said:

... 'powerful elements of right-wing politics' had abandoned the liberal tradition in favour of 'a belligerent, intolerant populism which shows no respect for either the rights of individual citizens or the traditional institutions which protect them'.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms GRALEY — Take that, over there.

So far in this debate — I have had a good look at it and I listened to it yesterday afternoon — we have seen elements of that crass populism, a lack of respect for the rights of the individual and attacks on institutions that seek to protect people. We have seen lots of

flag-waving happening in this chamber recently and out there in the community too, trying to whip up the battlers to make them think that maybe the Liberal Party has something to offer them. In the course of debate on this bill, when members have said they were opposing this bill, which is absolutely unbelievable as far as I can see, looking at it from the perspective of the good people of Narre Warren South, they have thrown up a whole lot of lame excuses.

They have had the union bogeymen running around and they have expressed that big fear of red tape. Every time I hear that too much red tape argument, I look across the chamber and see a whole lot of failed businessmen who love to blame red tape or to take a whack at an interventionist government — we have heard about that too — as an excuse for not being successful or not being willing to pay a fair wage for a good day's work. We have heard all these arguments about the burden on business. In fact we have also heard that it is none of our business, that this is a federal matter. Yet today in this chamber and on Tuesday night we heard the member for Benambra get on his feet and ask questions about it, asking our Minister for Industrial Relations to intervene.

This is exactly the sort of space our industrial relations minister should be in, because this is well and truly about what most Australians believe should be happening when they go to work — that they are not going to be ripped off, that when they go to work and work hard they get paid a fair wage. That is an Australian value; that when you turn up for work you have a First World workplace and your family knows that you are going to come home at the end of your shift and that equality and equity are practised at your workplace. You get a fair go, and you have some security around your employment so you can live that Australian dream, the Australian dream that everybody in my electorate wants to live. They want to own a home, they want to provide for their families and, most of all, like my parents and me and I imagine at least everybody on this side of the house, but I will be generous and say those people opposite too, wants the next generation — our kids — to have better opportunities.

I refer to a submission to the Forsyth inquiry, which has provided such good material for this legislation, an inquiry that went right across the state and had 113 public hearings and 695 written submissions. There are some who do not agree with it and there are a lot who do agree that this is the way that we should go. I have heard criticism of this bill that it is not everything that the Forsyth inquiry said; we have gone a step further. Well, lo and behold, that is what you

can do when you are in government. That is what you can do when you get elected with a mandate. That is what you can do when you get elected with a part of your platform that says you are actually going to have this inquiry.

I looked through some of the submissions and I saw one from the National Union of Workers (NUW), a very good union that really does look after a lot of low-paid workers. I hear the scoffing and laughter from The Nationals over there, but there are a lot of places in your electorates where I know the National Union of Workers are very active and for good reason. In 'Section one: insecure work today', the submission says:

It is estimated that 40 per cent of work in Australia is insecure.

That is a stunning statistic. You can look around your community and think that 40 per cent of the people that go to work every day may not have secure employment. I would say that is un-Australian. Then the NUW comes to the conclusion in this part of the submission that:

This comes at a cost to the public good. Insecure work discourages long-term investment in people, and detracts from our common prosperity.

The public good — that is what I would like to hear more about, us politicians working for the public good. I can see there will always be some people who will want — prefer — casual labour. There will be some labour hire firms that actually provide seasonal work that is paid at a fair wage. They are not our target. It would be very good if more people, that 40 per cent of Australians, could have secure work and get paid. They are losing at the moment, and we need them to be back in a winning situation, because as that comment relays, if they are losing, we all lose.

The second point I would like to make is that I too have seen that documentary on the ABC, 'Slaving away'. It reminded me of a novel I read about a year ago, *The Year of the Runaways* by Sunjeev Sahota. It tells the story of immigrants who are going to the UK in search of a job, in search of a better future and of course hoping to provide for their families. It is a novel of extraordinary ambition. It is like one of those 19th century epic novels with a cast of characters who keep getting into trouble or getting let down by things. What is really frightening is that this is 21st century Britain.

Following that I actually saw 'Slaving away', and I have got to say, it was like seeing that book located in an Australian environment where people are just being exploited by contractors. They are being paid less than

the minimum wage. They are being denied superannuation. We are proud as a country that we have a universal superannuation scheme, and yet a significant proportion of Australians cannot access that if they are being put on by a labour hire firm that refuses to provide superannuation, which is in fact illegal. They are forced to work excessive hours, and sometimes, if they decide that they cannot make it to work that day for family reasons or sickness, they are given a bit of a hurry on or a bit of a grilling and a bit of pressure, and really, either they lose their job or they are very fearful of losing their job. This can create all sorts of stresses and strains on their family.

If you want to be convinced of just what we should be doing here or you need to be further convinced that what we are doing here is correct, return to some of these workers' stories. A worker was getting \$12.50 per hour in precarious employment at a site where minor injuries were happening — so not really a nice place to turn up to every day to get \$12.50 per hour. This is what that worker said:

The government should put themselves in those disadvantaged workers' shoes, and learn about the difficulties they might face especially those treated unfairly by the factory owners as well as the contractors or agents. I would then set laws, implement them, and enforce the law effectively. A severe fine should be imposed on those who fail to comply with the laws.

Thank you to that National Union of Workers member, because that sort of material has been good information that has informed this legislation, that has empowered the minister and that makes us all on this side of the chamber very proud supporters of a bill that will actually provide security, a good wage and a future for the families of the workers. It is a highly commendable bill, and again I would like to say thank you to the minister for bringing it to the house. Without further ado, I commend it to the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Suleyman) — The member for Frankston.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (14:38) — Thank you, Acting Speaker, and it is lovely to see you in the big seat at this moment. I rise to speak on this landmark bill very proudly. I am very proud to support this bill. This is indeed the kind of bill that I think is the reason I first became interested in politics and had a hunger to be in Parliament — it is for bills like this.

First of all I want to issue some congratulations to my colleague the Minister for Industrial Relations and her very hardworking team, and I want to congratulate Professor Anthony Forsyth for the labour hire licensing review that he conducted and the recommendations that

he provided to government. Those who have been listening to my friend from Narre Warren North —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr EDBROOKE — Narre Warren South, excuse me. They will know that there were over 695 individuals and organisations that made submissions to that review, and I thank them for their passionate stories about insecure work, about underpayment of wages and about never being able to get a mortgage because of the precarious nature of their employment and also for the examples they offered of the shonky practices that are all too common in the labour hire sector. I would also congratulate the many, many workers and unions that provided testimony to that review.

It is the unions that I would say pushed hardest for this legislation, and that is entirely appropriate seeing as they are the people who have to act and have probably got the deepest experience of dealing with these issues and with the individuals experiencing these issues.

In my great electorate of Frankston I hear at least once or twice a week that people are having issues with their employment. We heard that up to 40 per cent of people are actually in insecure employment around the state, and certainly in Frankston I would say that we are on par with that. This is because of an explosion, I guess, of labour hire, where wages have been suppressed at the same time. People feel insecure in their employment. They are on casual rates. People are feeling that their jobs are very precarious, that they could be fired at any time and that they have no job security. They do not spend money in the community and contribute in that way, and as I have said, they find it hard to get a mortgage. Of course our economy suffers as a result of that.

It is true to note, though, that many of those labour hire agencies only get business by exploiting workers. They would not be here without exploiting workers and peddling in the fact that they can do it more cheaply than anyone else, and therefore they get the contracts by exploiting workers. We do hear very often in the chamber from supposed small business people in the opposition. If they were in small business, I guess they would not be here. We hear about the inability of businesses to survive through wage rises, and I would say that there is a balance that can be struck. At the moment we are well out of kilter and we need to fix it, and this bill does that.

So to the opposition I would say, after having heard people talk on this subject previously: put aside that

passion you have that is anti-union and anti-Labor, and have a look at how much common sense is involved in this bill. Have a look at the fact that this bill was put to our public, the Victorian people, in the form of an inquiry and that out of that inquiry came some recommendations. That is what we are acting on. Put aside that ignorance of people's disadvantage, which we certainly see in Frankston, and the lack of passion to actually want to do something about it.

As we know, at the moment earnings are stagnant and not in keeping with the cost of living, and that is hurting a lot of people. For anybody in this place to think it is reasonable to argue for people to have reduced wages and for people's wages not to have security and be protected, it is absolutely ridiculous and it shows that the opposition are so out of touch it is not funny.

It is true that we have seen many, many shonky work practices brought to light, whether it be on social media or on the ABC recently. The Fair Work ombudsman has commenced litigation in the Federal Court against a Brisbane labour hire business that has allegedly underpaid 10 employees more than \$14 000 through an unlawful, unpaid work experience program. We have heard that the Victorian Trades Hall Council has been looking into this lately, and that what they have found is quite horrific.

What this labour hire business did was get people, including two 19-year-olds, to go out to businesses and work anywhere from three to 24 days. The firm regarded it as work experience, so the workers were not receiving payment for it; instead the firm was receiving payment for it. These are the kinds of things we want to protect Victorians against. These are the kinds of things that those opposite do not actually consider a problem, which says a lot in itself.

Legitimate labour hire companies are not a problem. I think if you have got something to hide, then yes, you would be worried about how this bill might impact you, but for the people who are doing the right thing out there, I do not think they would see any problem with this bill if they are not exploiting people. We are talking about people like the workers in places like A & G Lamattina & Sons, which was raided by the Fair Work Commission.

Allow me to segue just for a second. There was a story from 15 November 2016 about workers in the vegetable industry, at a company which grows broccoli, carrots, celery, parsnips, silverbeet and lettuce. The Fair Work Commission allowed a raid of that company because the workers were so transparently and horribly being exploited — very overtly. Now, I am not a large

believer in coincidence either, but I think it is something to look into — that A & G Lamattina & Sons were raided for exploiting workers and, just by coincidence, the opposition opposes labour hire licensing, while their leader dines on lobster and drinks Grange with and possibly seeks donations from alleged Mafia bosses and the owners of these farms. Could it be — and bear with me here; I do not think it is too far of a stretch — that they are seeking to corrupt elected officials by promising donations and dirt in return for rezoning? Could it be that they are not liking being justifiably raided by the Fair Work Commission?

Mr Battin — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, whilst this is a wideranging debate, I cannot see how this has any relevance at all to the bill. It is totally off track. The member needs to go back to where the bill is actually heading.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Suleyman) — I would say there is no point of order.

Mr EDBROOKE — I think we have struck a nerve there. I just ask the opposition to consider the fact that at the moment we have some decent bills before the house — bills that will change our community for the better. When good policy like this is brought into this house or presented to our community for their opinion, and when recommendations are made essentially by our community, it is pooh-poohed by opposition members.

But do they actually ask their shadow cabinet what they are doing when they come out with thought bubble policies that they would like to bring into this house? I might talk about their new education curriculum that has been spoken about. The President of the Australian Education Union has said it is out of touch and a thought bubble, and others have said it is absurd. We are hearing that the 55 intersections policy undercuts livability. Legal experts are saying that mandatory sentencing for ice dealers is unenforceable. When we have —

Mr Battin — I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Mr EDBROOKE — We hear that the opposition desperately wants to be an alternative government, but they do not support our most vulnerable workers. We do, and for this reason I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (14:48) — It gives me great pleasure to not only follow my good friend the member for Frankston but also speak on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. It gives me pleasure because it is, as the member for Narre Warren South and others

have said, something that we are committed to and we are delivering. It is always with a sense of accomplishment and justice to the people we serve when we do the things we say we are going to do, and this is one of those things. We are committed to this legislation and we are committed to it in a very strong way. It follows a two-year robust inquiry, which received almost 700 submissions and was headed by a very talented man, Professor Anthony Forsyth, who is excellent. It has a very good foundation, a foundation that was built out of the atrocious stories of many, many disenfranchised and vulnerable workers across Victoria.

It almost beggars belief that we need to restate the problem, because you would imagine that it is quite a clear problem that has not only been exposed in the media but also in the debate here. I will, as other colleagues have done, read a submission from one of these hardworking Victorians from Mulgrave, either in my electorate or the Premier's electorate, because we overlap a bit. This person worked through a labour hire agency Skilled Group and worked at Peters Ice Cream. This person said:

I was employed through a labour hire agency in my current job. Called to work then cancelled the agency won't pay 4 hours ... Roster change dramatically from day to day. One week I only got 14 hours or less than 4 hours a week. I was employed through a labour hire agency more than 13 years ago as a casual worker trying to find full-time work. Three months ago company hired new workers full-time. Be very nice if we could have a chance to apply. We can't afford to pay for our mortgage, pay for our bills and put food on the table for our children.

There are literally thousands and thousands of those stories. Imagine working in the same place for 13 years and then somebody comes in on top of you and gets a full-time job and you have to go to the bank with your casual pay slips for 13 years. As the member for Bentleigh stated very articulately, it is about dignity and it is about access to the ladder of opportunity. This is an enormous problem.

I remember a conversation I had with the national secretary of the National Union of Workers, a union that I am very proudly associated with. He gave me an example, and I do not want to quote him verbatim, but it was around the following circumstances. Some middle-aged women working in, I think, a warehouse of a logistics firm through a light labour hire agency were called into the tearoom one day and they were told without any notice, 'We need to check your fitness levels, so get on the floor and do 20 push-ups'. Just like that! Those who failed were requested to exit with no obligations on the part of that company or any rights provided in terms of redundancies — absolutely appalling behaviour. There are thousands of stories that

do not get told, and this is a problem that we have been dealing with.

There is a range of things that came out of the inquiry. Professor Forsyth's inquiry found that labour hire workers are treated less favourably than direct hire workers in ways ranging from differential treatment in respect of rostering and health and safety to outright exploitation. That is not just anyone saying that; that is from an absolutely thorough two-year inquiry. The inquiry also found that current federal workplace relations laws have not been effective in stamping out exploitation because so many labour hire providers operate in a black economy out of the view of regulators.

This is a genuine and real problem. The other side are talking about federal regulation and industrial relations. Clearly in this area it is not working. The Victorian inquiry recommended, however, that Victoria advocate for a national approach to labour hire licensing, which would make sense, and we have done that. The minister in her second-reading speech said:

But it has become clear that the current federal government has no intention of protecting workers and developing a national labour hire licensing scheme. On 22 May this year, the then federal Minister for Agriculture, the Honourable Barnaby Joyce, dismissed calls for a national labour hire licensing scheme, stating that state governments should be able to regulate the labour hire industry because, and I quote 'states have got to have a purpose to exist'.

As others have said, with that kind of attitude from the federal government there is no way they can come and create a public policy response that counts in the space, so we have to.

There is clearly market failure in this area of public policy and worker rights. I am not denying the need of the market and global capital to employ labour in the way it needs to employ labour, and that could be absolutely, in the employers' terms, flexibly. They could say, 'I only need 6 hours of labour today. I might need 60 tomorrow. I need to be able to be provided with labour flexibly'. I get that. I understand that. We understand that.

What should happen normally in those circumstances is that the human dignity and the rights a worker has should be transferred to the labour hire agency from the customer, which was formerly the employer but is now the customer, because they are procuring that service from a labour hire agency. But what has happened in many, many situations is that those rights and the dignity of those workers have not been transferred; they have actually been dumped altogether, with low wages, with no superannuation, with no leave entitlements and,

as with the type of example I described before, with completely unethical treatment. That was never the intention of flexible labour — never. I do not think that is anything that any one of us would accept.

Just to go briefly to the clauses of the bill, they are so inoffensive I cannot understand why anyone would not be voting for this. Let us look at the objects of the act. Tell me how insidious this is — obviously, it is not for us, but those on the other side find something insidious in it. The bill says:

The objects of this Act are—

- (a) to protect workers from being exploited by providers of labour hire services and hosts; and
- (b) to improve the transparency and integrity of the labour hire industry.

I could never argue with that.

There is another clause, which I think is very important, that states that for any person who proposes to enter into an arrangement with another person for labour hire, if that person:

... has reasonable grounds to suspect, that the proposed arrangement is for the purpose of avoiding or circumventing an obligation that would otherwise be imposed upon the client, the supplier ... by this Act.

That is what we are trying to avoid. These are the obligations that should ordinarily be paid to workers and to human beings. These are not robots; these are people.

The other clause that is very material, and I cannot think of why anyone would object to this, but of course we have found those on the other side objecting to it, is the fit and proper person test if you want to run a labour hire agency. All that this bill is asking, for example, is that a person who:

- (a) within the preceding 10 years, the person or a body corporate of which the person was an officer, has been found guilty of—
 - (i) an indictable offence against the person, or an offence involving fraud, dishonesty or drug trafficking that was punishable by a term of imprisonment of 3 months or more at the time the person was found guilty ...

should not be entitled to receive a licence for labour hire. That is entirely and eminently reasonable. We are not dealing with widgets; we are dealing with human beings who have mortgages, who have children to feed, who have a whole range of life chances that they should have access to for the dignity of a job that pays and provides some security.

This bill is very timely. In fact it was probably due years ago, but it takes of course a reformist government, as this government is, to implement that change. In speaking to the workers of Victoria, those vulnerable workers, you have always got to worry about a party of the establishment, a government of the establishment, that does not want to change things. Because when you do not change things, you miss an entire cohort of people who get into trouble and are at risk because the economy changes. We have not ignored those people that are at risk because they are the people who put us in this very Parliament to look after them. So I am immensely proud that it is an Andrews Labor government that is directly saying, 'We will take a load off your life and your work life by looking after you and by forcing labour hire agencies to treat you the way every reasonable employer should treat their employees'. There are fantastic labour hire companies, but there are too many that do not do the right thing.

I want to thank the minister. I want to thank the National Union of Workers, which made a fantastic submission. It is a union that looks after many of these people, who, without it and without a Labor government, would not have a voice. I could not be prouder of this piece of legislation. I absolutely know that it will make a material difference to the daily lives of thousands of workers in Victoria who get up every morning and have to deal with bosses and unscrupulous employers that this bill seeks to address. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) (14:58) — I am delighted to make a contribution on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. I listened to many contributions yesterday and today. It has been a wideranging debate and a very good debate. It is notable on many levels that very few opposition members have spoken, but some of their contributions were interesting. I listened with great interest to the member for Ferntree Gully's contribution. It was a very detailed contribution because the member for Ferntree Gully is an industrial relations practitioner. He spoke at length about his understanding of the federal industrial relations system. It was an interesting contribution because he said that where there are examples of illegal behaviour it is clearly a matter for the Fair Work Commission and legal action can be taken. It reminded me of that great quote by Anatole France who, in the 19th century, wrote:

... the law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets and to steal bread.

Mr Wynne — How many languages do you speak, brother?

Mr PEARSON — Sadly I am only perfectly fluent in bogan. But it was this notion that of course everyone is equal before the law, and that all of us have got the right to pursue legal action without fear of consequence. I think there was a bit of banter across the table between the member for Ferntree Gully and the Attorney-General. The member for Ferntree Gully seemed to be implying that there were instances where he had in a past life reason to contact the now Attorney-General when he was the state secretary of the National Union of Workers to deal with these anomalies which would occur from time to time. But it does not reflect reality, because the reality is that there are people who are isolated, who are vulnerable and who have been exploited. There might be women, people on 457 visas, people who do not know the laws of our nation, people who are impoverished, people who are vulnerable, people who might not be members of a trade union or people who will not have those opportunities.

In a perfect world of course you would not regulate, but we are not living in a perfect world. We are living in a world where people are being routinely exploited and where people who are vulnerable are being taken advantage of. When you see that happening, it is incumbent upon the government of the day to act and respond, and that is exactly what we are doing.

I, like many members of this place, am extremely proud to be a member of a trade union. One of the proudest moments in my life happened when I was 14 and I got a union card. I was able to become a member of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association. I have still got my union card from all those years ago. For me becoming a member of a trade union was a proud moment; I felt like I had come of age. A debate like this is interesting because those on this side of the house have declared our love for the union movement, our love for the labour movement and our desire to use the power of the state to protect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community. I checked the speaking list last night, and by my reckoning there are only Labor members left to speak on this bill. You would probably say that that is not surprising, because we are of course a labour party; we have been defending the interests of working Australians since 1891.

But it is more important and relevant to note that there are three members of the Greens political party who reside in this place, and not one of them has got to their feet to defend workers. That great commissar of Chapel Street, the comrade from Prahran, is nowhere to be seen. When it comes to defending the rights of convicted drug dealers and cop killers, he will rise to his feet every time to defend those people. But is he

interested in defending women? No. Is he interested in defending those vulnerable workers who have been ripped off and exploited? He is nowhere to be seen. He is conspicuously absent. He has an opportunity to come here and say, 'I am proud to join you in this great labour cause, in this great labour crusade. I stand with you on the picket line to defend the isolated, the disadvantaged and the vulnerable'. Where is he? He is probably having a chai latte down in his office. That is where he is. He has an opportunity to stand up and defend the working class, but like the coward that he is, he will scurry over to the member for Box Hill to seek his instructions on doing over a Labor government at every single opportunity. At every single opportunity he is there, side by side with the member for Box Hill, sticking it to a Labor government. But when it comes to standing up for working people and defending the rights of vulnerable, disadvantaged people, he is nowhere to be seen. He is an absolute disgrace.

I also note that the National Party have been very vocal on this bill. I know that the member for Murray Plains in his contribution yesterday indicated very clearly that he had no interest in supporting this bill. I had never heard of Emma Field before today, but I understand that she is a journalist of some repute in regional Victoria. On Twitter she said:

Very disappointing, @PeterWalshMP. As a journo who has covered the widespread exploitation of farm workers in Vic and beyond, I would have thought you had a responsibility to make sure all labour hire firms are legit, and farm owners/workers are protected.

Again, why wouldn't The Nationals support vulnerable rural workers? Why would they allow vulnerable rural workers to be exploited in this way? It is just extraordinary that they seem to be so happy to throw their lot in with the side of capital and not Labor and to basically reach a conclusion that they are quite happy for vulnerable workers in regional Victoria to be exploited in this way. It is disgraceful.

The bill that is before the house is the result of extensive work and consultation. We recognise that where there is market failure, the state is obliged to intervene, and that is what we are doing. You should not have a situation where dodgy companies are being set up and are exploiting the most vulnerable workers. It is the right thing to do. It is the appropriate policy response. Going to the comments made yesterday by the member for Ferntree Gully, of course in a perfect world you would not regulate. You would have no need to because you would have reputable, responsible employers who would pay their workers fairly and appropriately, who would make sure that they had their

superannuation paid and who would make sure that they had decent entitlements.

It seems to be lost on those opposite that the reason why we have these conditions in our industrial relations framework is not because of the generosity of the employers; it is a result of the labour movement being organised, being established and working for the interests of its members. In many ways it is the perennial battle between labour and capital, and it is about making sure that there is a fair, reasonable and equitable distribution of the profits of enterprise and about making sure that the workers who work in these industries are protected and are not exploited because they might not speak English or because they are a single parent or a single mother trying to raise their children on their own and are desperate for the work.

It is also worth noting that we are living in an environment where the middle class is being hollowed out. We are seeing a low-wages-growth environment in which it is a lot harder for people to get ahead. That is why it is even more important to have appropriate protections put in place to ensure that people are properly protected. I fear the days when we see regular significant wages growth at 4 per cent or 5 per cent compounding per annum are gone; I think we are looking at a low-wage-growth, low-inflation environment, and that would seem to be the way of the world for probably the next decade. When we are looking at that downward pressure on wages and income — and, okay, it is welcome that inflation is not out of control — we need to make sure there are appropriate protections in place.

I am really proud to be a member of the labour movement. I am proud to be a member of the Australian Workers Union. I am proud to belong to a government that is putting people first and is defending the interests of working Victorians. Shame on the Greens political party for being conspicuously absent when they should be standing with us, defending the rights of the working class.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (15:09) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. I want to begin by congratulating the Minister for Industrial Relations for her work. She should be proud of the work she has put into this bill. This has been an issue in Geelong for many, many years. Like the member for Essendon, I am very proud to have been a union member — and I am still a union member — but in my time as president of the Geelong Trades Hall this was an issue that we continually dealt with. Vulnerable workers coming into Trades Hall or

through their union were highlighting some of the issues that this bill will address.

I think it is important that we understand the impact on workers who are affected by these dodgy labour hire companies. It was not just the unions and their members; it was also businesses that were coming to Trades Hall complaining about the issues around these dodgy labour hire companies because they were actually undercutting genuine, honest businesses that were just trying to get on with their job. They were being done over by these dodgy businesses. So this was an issue not just for workers but for businesses as well and for the Geelong community. As I said, it has been around for a lot of years in Geelong, so we are very pleased that this bill has been brought before the house and of course by the work done by the minister.

There were a number of submissions that were lodged by Geelong, and we also had the inquiry visit Geelong. It was made very clear that there were some serious issues in our local community. The Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia also made a submission, which impacted on some of the dodgy labour hire contractors in Geelong. But I want to refer to the Geelong Trades Hall submission, because they outlined many, many serious issues in a lot of different industries. It was not just hospitality, it was not just some of the issues that we hear about in different industries; it was a whole range of industries.

One common complaint that Geelong Trades Hall and unions were hearing about from workers engaged by labour hire firms with rising employment and safety issues was that employers or host companies were not providing any more work if they complained. There was the opportunity for those dodgy businesses to not give those workers any more work if they raised issues, particularly around safety concerns. When they tried to lodge a complaint with the Fair Work Ombudsman, their complaint was not accepted because their employment had not been terminated; they were just not being given any more work. This also made it difficult for them to apply for unemployment benefits without the normal separation certificate one receives when employment ceases, so a lot of these people found themselves without any income.

There are some employers who deliberately attempt to increase their profits by avoiding paying employees in accordance with the law. There is a secondary objective by some employers who enter into illegal employment arrangements to create a subservient workforce that do not raise safety issues or demand their employment rights. This arrangement is particularly common in the labour hire sector. The office of Fair Work closed in

Geelong several years ago and was replaced by a hotline that does not provide an advocacy service. Young workers are not educated at school about employment law or their rights in the workplace. This is leading to more and more exploitation of workers in Geelong.

A lot of these issues were raised, and while there was a lot of attention given to unscrupulous operators in the horticultural, cleaning and meat sectors around our region, it became apparent that there were problems across many other industries as well, such as the retail, demolition, hospitality, nursing home, construction, manufacturing, dental and beauty industries. Geelong Trades Hall raised a lot of these in their submission and talked particularly about cleaners being contracted to clean some of our big retail stores and the impact that it had on them:

The contractor employed local asylum seekers and paid cash in hand. The scam relies on paying one person, who has a work permit, who was then required to pay three other workers cash from his account. Thus creating a paper trail that only leads to one worker and appears to be above award payments. When Trades Hall attempted to contact the employer about the breaches he filed for insolvency and has not been seen since.

That case was ongoing at the time.

In the demolition area the Geelong Trades Hall Council writes:

A demolition recycling yard set up in Corio two years ago and recruited workers through MatchWorks with government subsidies. When the subsidies ran out the employer would recruit more workers to replace them. The workers were threatened not to speak to the Australian Workers Union or they would be sacked. About 20 workers were underpaid wages and no superannuation. Claims for both have since been lodged with Fair Work and the Australian Tax Office.

And it goes on to a number of others. There were some issues raised in local government surprisingly and in the hospitality industry.

Some secondary school students doing the vocational education and training program reported to Trades Hall so they could find out about their workers rights, and as part of the discussion it was revealed that some of the students were working for a local hotel and being paid \$10 per hour, cash in hand, which further meant they received no superannuation and probably no workers compensation either.

In the medical area:

Two young women complained that their employer had sacked them after claiming he lost investments and could not pay them ...

the four weeks wages they were owed.

Fortunately, one woman was in the Health Workers Union and the local industrial officer ...

was able to get the money back for her.

In areas like farming there were many issues raised. Private nursing homes, small retail hospitality areas and a nail and foot area were also highlighted in their submission. I think these are a really clear indication that we have a serious problem. I met with a number of small business operators, particularly in the construction area, who felt they were being continually undercut by these dodgy hire companies. We then saw a number of companies in Geelong make their workers redundant and then get a labour hire firm to re-employ them under much lower conditions, and that happened in a number of places across the region.

In Geelong we have had vast experience around dodgy labour hire firms. The union movement has been very strong in advocating on behalf of workers. I know that they have pushed for this bill for quite some years, and as I say, I am very pleased that the minister has taken that seriously. She conducted the inquiry. She looked at the recommendations and has looked at what can be put in place to assist those workers. Those on the other side can bang on about unions and union thugs, and a lot of it is just telling stories. That is just not true in Geelong, and we know that it is not true. There are some serious problems there. Workers in Geelong want the government to ensure that they are protected from these dodgy labour hire firms, and the more we allow those to continue, the worse the situation will become.

They do prey on vulnerable workers. In Geelong we have had some real challenges with the loss of Ford and the loss of Alcoa. Those workers who have been made redundant and lost their jobs want to know that they are secure in going into new employment not through some dodgy hire company but through genuine employers who do the right thing and pay the right wages. Of course we do have many of those in Geelong, but we have to get rid of these dodgy labour hire firms that are having a significant impact on vulnerable workers in our community. So I really do commend this bill to the house. I think it is an important bill, and it is one that we should all be supporting. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Planning) (15:19) — I am delighted to follow the member for Geelong in making a contribution to the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017, a bill that could only have been created by a Labor government. I am immensely proud to join with my colleagues today to make a contribution and to acknowledge the extraordinary work that has been undertaken by the Minister for Industrial Relations both

in her steadfast attention to the detail required to bring this bill to the house but also in a different context. As a former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I must say that the work the minister is doing in that space, particularly around shaping opportunities for a much more consistent articulation of the voice of Aboriginal people in the life of the Victorian community, has been quite extraordinary and is leading towards what we hope will be a treaty between Aboriginal Victorians and the Victorian government. She is really doing a superb job.

In that context we have seen over the last three years a catalogue of stories, including by the ABC and other journalists, who have really revealed the dark underbelly of the exploitation of workers in Australia. Our government of course set up the inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, which was chaired by Professor Anthony Forsyth, to investigate these things. The inquiry of course discovered an endemic culture of exploitation in an industry that has been left unregulated for far too long. Today, can I say, with this bill we are changing that and we are righting what has been a fundamental wrong done to some of the most vulnerable workers in this state.

I am reminded of that particularly today because we had a delegation today that came to see members of Parliament about long service leave. The representatives of United Voice brought along workers who are in the cleaning industry and in the security industry, and they spoke of a catalogue of lost opportunities simply because of the way contracting worked in their industry and the way contracting almost ensured that there was not a possibility for them to trigger their long service leave. These are people who may have been employed through successive contracts, in one case over 30 years, who have not had one day of long service leave available to them. Again this is a fundamental wrong that only a Labor government will right, and I look forward to that legislation coming before the Parliament in the future.

Today's bill is a corollary of that. What the inquiry found was that rogue operators were underpaying workers, not ensuring proper safety standards, abusing worker visas and undermining the minimum standards of employment. To stop this exploitation we have introduced and are now debating a universal licensing scheme to protect workers across all sectors from labour hire providers that have been operating, frankly, in the shadows of workplace laws.

Not surprisingly, the inquiry had an enormous level of engagement. There were nearly 700 submissions, more than 600 from individuals with the remaining submissions coming from a number of organisations,

including employer organisations and also obviously our colleagues in the trade union movement. There were a huge number of public hearings over 17 days and in excess of 220 witnesses. We know the problem is huge and that it cuts across every electorate in Victoria. It particularly affects regional Victoria, and I will come to that in a moment.

The new scheme will bring much-needed transparency to the labour hire industry, and under the new scheme businesses will need to be licensed and treat their workers fairly or face significant penalties. Importantly the bill is not designed to impose either additional workplace laws, tax, superannuation or health and safety obligations on labour hire businesses; rather it is aimed at allowing compliance with existing laws to be examined and verified and at excluding non-compliant operators from industry. The Victorian bill, I am pleased to say, is similar to the Queensland and South Australian bills in many ways in order to provide a harmonised licensing system.

I draw your attention to some seminal work that, not surprisingly, was undertaken by the ACTU and, in particular, by my former boss, Brian Howe. He undertook a review of insecure work on behalf of the trade union movement. The title of his seminal work was *Lives on Hold*. This was an important initiative by the ACTU, and whilst I do not want to cover it in great detail I do want to acknowledge the important and groundbreaking work of the ACTU, which of course Brian authored. I just want to read out a couple of his recommendations, which were that:

... we must ensure that labour law provides protection to all workers, rather than legally sanctioning exceptionalism by removing a whole range of securities and entitlements from certain workers.

We have made a number of recommendations setting out how we believe this might be achieved.

First, labour law must be reformed to provide a universal set of protections to all Australian workers.

What does that speak to? It speaks to the need for a national approach. What do we have from the current federal government? Complete silence, complete apathy, a complete lack of interest in ensuring that the most vulnerable workers in our community are afforded a level of protection — not just in Queensland but also in other states. Obviously such protections will exist in Victoria with the passage of this bill, but we need a national approach to addressing these questions because workers are often itinerant; they often move from state to state. Protections that would be afforded to them in this state are not necessarily available to them in other jurisdictions.

I listened very carefully to the contribution of my colleague the member for Yan Yean, who spoke of her experiences in the Mildura region. She spoke of how difficult it was for her as a young woman working in the fruit-picking industry there and the exploitation that she experienced as a young woman starting off her career.

I was also interested to read about the contribution that was made by the member for Mildura in his submission to the inquiry. According to an article in the *Weekly Times*, the member for Mildura was:

... 'supporting some form of regulation of labour hire contractors', which he believed should be handled by the federal government.

Sure, but there is silence on their part. According to the article, the member for Mildura said:

I support registration ... (which) should be displayed and made available to workers ...

The article also says that:

Victorian Nationals leader Peter Walsh said labour hire regulation was a federal matter, but 'it is important that people who work for labour hire contractors are treated fairly'.

I note that the Leader of The Nationals has declared that the position of the National Party and indeed the Liberal Party is that they will oppose this legislation. But I do not think you could find a more representative sample of exploitation right across regional Victoria than what we see in a number of National Party seats. The National Party representatives in those seats have not listened to either the Victorian Farmers Federation, which supports this legislation going forward, or indeed the workers and communities that they were elected to serve.

In conclusion, can I say that I do underline the commentary of my colleague the member for Essendon in his contribution when he pointed out that there has been an opportunity during the last two days for the Greens political party to make a contribution to this debate and to actually stand with us.

An honourable member — Where is Melbourne?

Mr WYNNE — Where is the member for Northcote, where is the member for Melbourne and indeed where is the member for Prahran in this crucial debate? They are lacking, and by their lack of participation in this debate they stand condemned.

Ms HENNESSY (Minister for Health) (15:29) — I am really delighted to stand and make a contribution on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017, particularly following the irrepressible Minister for Planning. I

commend him for his erudite, compelling, engaging yet informed contribution, as his contributions always are. In the course of my contribution I will make some reflections — not adverse reflections, but reflections — upon the contributions of other people.

One of the less-than-wonderful, I suppose, human characteristics that I have observed is that generally people and communities are very interested in looking up and perhaps aspiring to have the resources that other people have. What we do not do so well is look across and down at the circumstances of many who live with and around us, at what they are encountering and enduring. What I think is one of the most important aspects of the policy sitting behind this bill is the fact that it actually looks at that. The process that has been used in developing this bill brings light to and has put a spotlight on what some of the most vulnerable people in our state have been experiencing. There are those who are employed — and I use the term 'employed' loosely, because we know from the evidence to the labour hire inquiry that people are in fact not given the standard conditions of employment — and who got up to go to work. They might have got a phone call and they might have come out of a rooming house where 30 people live in a three-bedroom house to go to a workplace where they are not given appropriate health and safety protection, where they are not paid appropriately and where they are not paid a wage that any human being could ever possibly live on.

That was part of the evidence that was given to this inquiry and was part of the genesis of this bill. Those are experiences that in my view no public policy or legislative leader should ever be ignoring. I will talk about the position of other political parties in this chamber in a moment. One of the great issues that we have to confront, not just as a Parliament but as a community and a society, is the incredible growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots. The member for Essendon gave a fantastic contribution, in my view, around the growing inequality, the lack of wages growth that we see and the fact that so many people in our community are doing it tough. That is indeed in fact the case.

When we look to the evidence given to this inquiry — and I would like to reflect upon some of that evidence — we should be hearing the voices, hearing those experiences and feeling a rock-solid obligation to make sure that we do better by these people, because we can. One of the anonymous contributors said:

Safety? What safety? Only provided a flimsy paper mask provided despite using an angle grinder on concrete. Digging trenches by hand. Carrying unreasonably heavy things with no trolley or safe lifting measures in place. Operating power

tools with no training or gloves provided. The only safety gear is what I pick up around the worksite. No WorkSafe training or information. Bullied and yelled at. I'm depressed, suicidal, hungry all the time because I can't afford food.

This is the voice of a 21-year-old who lives in our state. We have an obligation to look at that experience and that set of circumstances and provide a better option. It is indeed my view that the Labour Hire Licensing Bill provides that very option. I do want to commend Mr Forsyth for the work that he led but particularly the Minister for Industrial Relations, who has really pursued this issue with vim and vigour, never being sidetracked by some of the hoary chestnut arguments that we constantly hear in this space. Some of those arguments are ones that I have heard trotted out by the Liberal and National parties in the course of this debate. I would like to be able to understand what the Greens position is on this, but of course we have not heard a contribution about the Greens position on this.

Some of those hoary chestnut arguments have the old, 'Well, we're concerned about red tape' — the old red tape argument. What I would point to for those who hide behind that fig leaf, that poor excuse of an argument to ignore the voices of these vulnerable workers who deserve better from all of us, is the fact that we should not be supporting businesses that essentially profiteer, that make their profits and exist by virtue of the deep exploitation of the people who provide that labour. It is as simple as that. I say to anyone concerned about red tape and the cost to businesses that ultimately we live in a civilised society, and a business where someone cannot afford to get to work, where they are not provided with the appropriate safety equipment and where they cannot put food on the table to feed their family is not a business that in a pure economic sense can afford to exist. These are human beings we are talking about. They are people who deserve to be paid appropriately and to be protected, not to be ignored by those who refuse to take their responsibilities in this Parliament seriously.

I would absolutely urge those on the other side of this chamber to reflect upon this, to reflect upon the fact that any unscrupulous employer that effectively feels the need to operate off slave labour conditions is not in a business that ought to exist. These are not pieces of equipment; they are human beings, and we support a regulatory approach that acknowledges that.

I would say to any employers out there: this is not a bill to be afraid of. This is a bill to be embraced. I say to those that make their profits honourably, that understand that their workforce is the key to their success, not a cost to their profits: this is a bill that puts a very simple regulatory regime in place. Those that

operate labour hire appropriately, with respect for their workforce, have absolutely nothing to hide.

What we do know is that there are unscrupulous employers out there that do exploit people, that do exploit people who are not taking up these jobs because they want them but are taking them up because they have nothing else. It is beholden on us to ensure, when they are forced by virtue of their economic vulnerability into those positions, that we do not simply sit back and admire the market failing. We have an obligation to intervene, and that is exactly what this bill does. It does so in an informed and appropriate way. It does so in a humane way. It does so in a way that is cognisant and reflective of the very needs that many good operators in the labour hire industry have outlined in the course of this debate.

We should not allow corporate shells to exist that use human beings as cannon fodder for the purposes of profiteering in their business. We say that there is a need to meet a standard, a standard of safety, a standard of economic security, a standard of respect for the people who are doing this work. That is what this bill seeks to do.

Again, the Minister for Industrial Relations has done an outstanding job in ensuring that we move from these working people being in the shadows. We should not sit back in our luxury Jason recliners on a Monday night and watch *Four Corners* and feel appalled at what appears before us on the television or ignore the stories of exploitation and not be prepared to do anything about them. That is precisely the position that the Liberals and The Nationals — and potentially the Greens — have adopted. I would like them to go and look in the eyes of some of the people that have honourably and bravely made testimony in the course of this inquiry and explain that they are concerned about red tape and not about the inherent human dignity of the people whose stories were so compellingly told.

This is our obligation. We do have an obligation to not let the market fail. We do have an obligation to actually understand and proportionately regulate. I do not buy the argument that the free market economy with its chill winds has delivered these people anything. It has delivered indignity, it has delivered them injury, it has delivered them entrenched poverty, it has put them in housing circumstances that are both unsafe and inhumane and it has had a drastic effect on their mental health and wellbeing. Let us give people that are in those situations the support that they deserve, the hope that they deserve and the dignity that they deserve. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HOWARD (Buninyong) (15:38) — I too am very pleased to follow on after the Minister for Health and a long line of members from this side of the house — the Labor side of the house, the government side of the house — to speak in favour of this Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. We know that over a long period of time, but particularly more recently, the number of people being indirectly hired through labour hire firms has increased and therefore employers do not have that direct relationship with the people they are employing on either a regular or temporary basis to undertake their work. We know that as a result of this there have been a number of complaints raised by people to each of us in our electorates and to a range of other people. A number of us have seen the episode of *Four Corners* that has been much talked about throughout this debate that showed examples of people who have been abused when employed in an indirect manner of employment by labour hire firms.

We know, though, that there are a number of labour hire firms that are doing appropriate jobs and linking up people who need employees with those who are available for employment, that the process is working appropriately in a number of cases. But clearly we have seen in the horticulture industry, the meat industry, the cleaning industry or a number of industries that seem to particularly use the labour hire process to meet their needs a number of cases of abuse. And we know that these people are generally lower paid people and people who are vulnerable. Sometimes they are new to our country and looking to make a fresh start. Sometimes they are young people looking to get into the workforce on a more regular basis and to make a start in the workforce. Sometimes they are older people who have been displaced from other forms of employment. They are clearly vulnerable individuals looking to get on, to get some income and to get a reliable income source to keep them and their families, in many cases, supported. Then they find that they are being abused, that the conditions of their labour cannot be relied upon to provide them with the money they should earn as a result of their work, that the employer is not following through on health and safety precautions that should be part of their working conditions and that they are not being supported in a range of other ways that people who are directly employed by their employer are.

So this government has acted. It has acted very appropriately, first of all, by engaging Professor Forsyth to undertake an inquiry into this matter to inform the government. The Forsyth inquiry received 700 submissions, and in its 17 days of public hearings across Victoria it gained some staggering feedback that showed we need a good government to respond to the issue. It made a number of

recommendations to the government that it is following through on.

One of those recommendations was that all employment hire companies be registered. It was suggested, quite sensibly, that this should be a national registration process. The inquiry's recommendation was for the state government to lobby the federal government, which should see that we need to take an appropriate approach and register labour hire organisations across the country on a standard basis. But sadly we know that the Turnbull government was totally unreceptive to this concept and simply threw it back at the state government and said, 'You've got the authority to do this. You get on and do it yourself. We're not interested in supporting a national system. We don't care, really, to get into this area'.

We learned in the early part of this debate from a few contributors from the coalition that clearly they do not support this either. They are beholden to some employers who say, 'No, we like this way of employing people. We don't want to put at risk our ability to undercut hire costs. We like the ability to undercut health and safety regimes', and so on. The coalition has no interest in supporting this legislation and the need to protect vulnerable workers. In fact it is not just that they do not support it; they spoke quite aggressively against it initially and then faded out pretty early on in this debate so that only Labor MPs have stood up and said, 'We want to support vulnerable workers'.

What is in this legislation that we are being told to fear or not support, according to the opposition? It is hard to understand because this bill does not impose any additional workplace laws and it does not impose any additional taxes, superannuation or health and safety obligations on people who are in the labour hire business. It merely requires the applicant to be fully licensed and to meet the existing obligations. It is not as though it is putting a great regime in place that is to be feared and that is going to put in place further requirements upon those who are doing the right thing in the labour hire area. Clearly those who are not doing the right thing in the labour hire area do need to fear this legislation because they will be brought to account. They will need to be registered, and there is the opportunity, of course, through this process to vet them properly and to do it on an ongoing basis.

This is very sound legislation. It is simply putting in place a process by which people will be appropriately registered if they are in the labour hire business to ensure that they do meet the basic requirements that are set out at the moment. They will be paying all staff appropriately, they will be paying all staff the other

additional payments that they might need in terms of superannuation and they will be meeting health and safety obligations. Those obligations will not simply be sidestepped because of a lack of clarity about who is actually the employer.

This is a very important piece of legislation. I am really pleased that the Minister for Industrial Relations has worked through this process, as we committed to doing before we came to office. Through the Forsyth inquiry we have shown that this is necessary and important legislation to provide the safeguards for those vulnerable people across the state. It shows that this is a government that cares for these sorts of people. Clearly, I think, that is why people on this side of the house do become members of the Labor Party. They want to see those who are vulnerable in our community appropriately supported. And it perhaps does show a very defining difference between those on this side of the house and those on the other side of the house, who clearly just cannot deal with these issues. They do not seem to think that they need to support vulnerable workers in our community, and clearly, in fact, they like this system of having contract staff or staff who are employed via a third party, where it does get a bit more unclear as to who has responsibility for supporting the staff, because they see that as an opportunity to undercut agreements and so on in the workplace.

I am certainly pleased to be standing here with my Labor colleagues supporting this bill. It has been soundly worked through, as other people have said. We have been listening to those awful cases of people who have been abused when they are vulnerable, hoping to get into the workforce and looking forward to getting reliable work and being treated appropriately as workers. We heard from The Nationals, and the Leader of the National Party spoke most vociferously against this legislation, because it is going to challenge those in the horticulture sector or in the meat sector, whereas this should not be the case. In fact we have heard from the Victorian Farmers Federation that they are generally supportive of this legislation — especially I suppose in relation to the horticulture sector, where they need people regularly at particular times through the year — because they want to show that they are good employers so that they can continue to attract people to work for them. So those who are doing the right thing can appreciate this bill; those who are doing the wrong things need to beware.

Mr J. BULL (Sunbury) (15:48) — I am very proud to have the opportunity to speak on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017 and to follow on from the fantastic contribution from my friend the member for Buninyong. It is and always has been the Labor Party

who stands up and fights for workers. It is and always has been the Labor Party who advances the rights, the protections and the safeguards of those who need them the most. I am very proud to be a unionist and proud to say that workers and their rights are always, each and every day, worth fighting for.

When our workers' rights are improved, we as a society improve and our social fabric improves. The Liberals want to have a culture war and talk about what is un-Australian. I will tell you what is un-Australian: it is selling out workers, not putting workers and their families first and not supporting the workers that need support the most. It is un-Australian to know that workers are being exploited, they are being hurt, they are being bullied, they are being harassed. A number of members this afternoon have spoken about stories which have been highlighted through this inquiry. The Andrews Labor government refuses to do nothing. We will fight for workers today, tomorrow and every day after, because we know that a person's working rights are fundamental for their health and for their happiness.

I did listen yesterday quite closely to a number of contributions, and I listened to the member for Ivanhoe, who spoke very well on the legislation. He spoke about our ability as individuals to forget about those that are exploited when we ourselves are not at that time being exploited. I thought that the member's comments were absolutely spot on. If you work in an environment where you are safe, where you are protected, where you are supported and where you are happy, it is quite easy to disregard or forget about those workers who are doing it incredibly tough as a result of weak laws and as a result of really poor operators. I would ask each member in the house to imagine how they would feel if they were being exploited at work. If it was their son, their daughter, a member of their family or their friends, I have no doubt that all members would be in agreement that they would be fighting for the conditions and the support for the individual that was subject to such exploitation. That is why this piece of legislation before the house this afternoon is so important.

Think about your first job. I know that I got mine at the age of 14 and nine months at IGA in Sunbury, of all places. I was nervous, I was wanting to do everything right, I did not want to upset the boss, I did not want the boss to fire up, get angry or yell at me — all the things that I think are natural emotions, all the things that we as employees are concerned about. I was incredibly fortunate that it was a supportive place to work, it was somewhere you were valued. I think if you put yourself in the position of not being valued, if you put yourself in the position of being fearful of that boss and, even more so, of being targeted and bullied by that employer,

that must be an incredibly traumatic experience, and many experiences like this have been highlighted by other members through the process of this legislation and certainly through the inquiry. It is a position of power to be in an employer's situation, and it is a position where often the employer will take advantage of that.

We as a society can and must be better than that. The measure of a fair society and the measure of a decent and kind society is how it treats its most vulnerable. There will always be disparity — always difference, always those that are more wealthy and those that are better off — but this does not have to remain a constant; this can be improved. Those who need support and those who need an equal chance should be a priority. They are a priority for the Andrews Labor government, a government of which I am incredibly proud to be a member. I hope that all members on this side of the house, all members supporting this legislation, will sleep better knowing that they are part of a team that is working hard to close the gap on those that are disadvantaged and working hard to put in place a range of safeguards and protections that provide help to those who need it most.

I mentioned the inquiry earlier on, and it was a significant piece of work. I do want to take this opportunity to thank Professor Anthony Forsyth and all of those that contributed to a fundamentally important inquiry. In total 695 written submissions were received; 604 of those were from individuals and the remaining 91 from organisations themselves. There were 113 public hearing sessions over 17 days both in metro and regional Victoria, and the inquiry heard from 221 individual witnesses during these sessions. Importantly, hearings were held in Mildura, Dandenong, Geelong, Melbourne, Shepparton, Melton, Ballarat and Morwell, so in a good cross-section of towns and regional cities right across Victoria. We know that this is a huge problem that cuts across each and every electorate, but in particular there are specific issues in regional Victoria.

Other members have mentioned the importance of what the scheme will do. The key features include universal coverage across the whole labour hire industry, management by an independent authority headed by a statutorily appointed commissioner, a requirement for labour hire providers to hold a licence, a requirement for hosts to use only a licensed provider, a range of regulations — which have been mentioned — and a requirement for licence applicants to provide information establishing that they are suitable to hold such a licence. We know that this will include a whole range of other factors, such as that key personnel are fit

and proper persons and the establishment of compliance with workplace laws — all of those protections that I mentioned earlier in my contribution. We also know that this bill will provide strong and flexible information-gathering, inspection and compliance tools, and these are particularly important going forward in evaluating the compliance of those operators in managing staff.

If we look at who will require a licence, we see that a person providing labour hire services in the course of a business will be required to hold a licence. Labour hire services involve the supply of a worker to another person to do the work. Under the bill, to get a licence in the first place we know that providers and key personnel will need to show, as I previously mentioned, that they are both fit and proper persons.

It is very much the case that there are traumatic and highly concerning incidents that happen through work, and the public as a whole are not aware of them. People are powerless. In many cases they are afraid. They are not willing or able to come forward and report many of these issues or they do not have the capacity to do so. They are underpaid, they are overworked, they are bullied, they are threatened, they are harassed and they are marginalised. What was incredibly concerning throughout the inquiry was the number of people who were being forced to work in conditions that are un-Australian.

I go back to the point that I believe makes our society, our state and our nation so strong, which is the knowledge, the support and the laws around who we are and what we are able to be. What support is around us? What conditions do we experience at work? What are the things that you take home at the end of the day? Are you able to come home to your family and your friends with a smile on your face? Are you able to live a decent, happy and healthy life? These are the things that make our state great and our nation great. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms GARRETT (Brunswick) (15:58) — I am most pleased, as members on this side of the house are, to have this profoundly solemn opportunity and privilege to speak on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. Dignity at work is one of those core values that we on this side of the house strive all of our working lives to achieve. How people are treated at work from the moment they walk through the door to the pay cheque that they take home to whether or not they make it home at all due to unsafe workplaces are what drive so many of us in the Labor Party. This bill, as a result of the outstanding work of the Minister for Industrial Relations, is a really important component of our life's

work to provide dignity and respect for people in their places of work.

It is perhaps not a surprise to people in this house, given the history of those of us in this party, that I used to work with Professor Anthony Forsyth at the Transport Workers Union (TWU). In fact he was the one who gave me one of my first-ever jobs. Back then I remember us working tirelessly on the huge amount of exploitation that goes on in the trucking industry and the owner-driver industry, and I know how important and critical the work of the TWU is in ensuring that that sort of exploitation is called out and stamped out. It is very fitting that a man with his immense knowledge — he is now a professor and a practising lawyer as well — was appointed by the minister to head up this inquiry. I know he had an outstanding team that assisted him in that process, because he knows firsthand the amazing, important, fundamental role that our union movement plays in keeping people's terms and conditions at work — and most critically their safety at work — protected and at the forefront of people's minds.

Another shout-out to the many unions which we are proudly associated with, including our friends at the CFMEU, the Maritime Union of Australia and many other unions, that every day, day in, day out, go in and make sure that the people who are working in their industries get the best possible protections, that they get paid well, that they get treated with respect and that they go home alive.

It also brought me to thinking about those great warriors on our side of the fence who come through with us. When I was researching my speech and I was thinking about the TWU and Anthony Forsyth, I came across a speech by Ged Kearney, which was on the TWU website. It was her thoughts on insecure work. Of course she has most recently been preselected as the Labor candidate for the federal seat of Batman. I thought I would just read some of her words when she spoke about this issue. She said:

Hundreds of thousands of other workers are employed through labour hire agencies, many without job security and not knowing when or where they will work next. And for thousands of others, insecure work is experienced in the form of irregular or unpredictable hours of work which mean fluctuating incomes and difficulties planning for their lives outside work.

...

There is a genuine risk that we are witnessing the emergence of a permanent working poor in Australia — people who do not know what hours they will work from week to week, and often juggle multiple jobs to attempt to earn what they need.

...

For them flexibility is not knowing when and where they will work, facing the risk of being laid off with no warning, and being required to fit family responsibilities around unpredictable periods of work. They cannot even afford to take time off when they or a family member is sick, because of the impact this has on their income and job security.

This bill, on which we are all very proud to speak, has numerous features that will go a long way to protecting the most vulnerable in their workplaces — those people who, when their work is so insecure and can be snuffed out at the drop of a hat, are the same people who find it very frightening to raise with their boss issues such as workplace health and safety, issues of fairness, issues of hours of work, issues of overwork or issues of underwork, because they know that at any given moment they may simply not be called again. How will they pay the rent or the mortgage or feed their kids?

The key features of the scheme that is provided for in this bill mean there will be universal coverage across the entire labour hire industry and, crucially, the scheme will be managed by an independent authority headed up by a statutorily appointed commissioner. This shows the seriousness with which the Andrews Labor government has taken this issue and the seriousness with which they are going to ensure its success. It will require labour hire providers to hold a licence, and it will require hosts to only use a licensed provider. This is a really important component of the scheme and, most importantly I believe, it also rewards those players in the industry who have been doing the right thing, who do rock up and make sure that the terms and conditions and safety of their employees are paramount. This scheme will make sure that those good guys and girls are recognised for that and, quite rightly, rewarded for it. That will assist in weeding out those dodgy, dodgy providers who have caused so much damage and destruction for so many good working Victorians.

There are many other features of this scheme, but the persons providing labour hire services in the course of a business will be required to hold a licence, and to get a licence under the Victorian bill labour hire providers and key personnel will need to show that they are fit and proper persons and are complying with their legal obligations.

If the house will indulge me, I digress slightly given that the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing is at the table and I worked with him closely on a similar scheme — not as extensive a scheme as this — regarding rooming house providers and making sure that they were licensed. He did fine, fine work over many years to ensure that that scheme came through. Again, like this scheme, it is Labor governments who deliver these things and deliver them for those people

who do not have a voice themselves or who find it very, very hard to be heard.

It is no surprise to anyone in this house that the inquiry had huge amounts of participation and interest, and I really think it is worth highlighting those things because this is not a piece of legislation that can be done hastily. It is not something that can be done half-baked because that can lead to worse circumstances. These are difficult regulatory environments to get right to make sure that you are protecting workers and those who are most vulnerable but you are not destroying businesses. It is an important balancing act, and the Andrews Labor government has taken that tightrope very well thanks to the work of the very good people involved in this and of course in particular the minister.

There were hundreds and hundreds of written submissions that were sent in to the inquiry, and interestingly over 600 of those were from individuals telling their stories, telling their experiences. I could talk all night on some of these stories of what people have experienced. I am sure everyone would be delighted with that, but apparently we have a 10-minute cut-off. I quote from one:

Safety? What safety? Only provided a flimsy paper mask provided despite using an angle grinder on concrete. Digging trenches by hand. Carrying unreasonably heavy things with no trolley or safe lifting measures in place.

Consider having to expose yourself to all of that, not knowing whether you are going home to your kids and then not having the capacity to have your voice heard, not being able to go to a safety rep or go to a union and say, 'This is an unsafe work practice'. If you raise it with the boss, you are not coming back the next day — story after story. Those are the voices that this government has heard. They are the voices that this government has listened to, and they are the voices, along with the union movement that represents them, that have led to the creation of this scheme. It is on their shoulders and on their behalf that this scheme will operate for the protection of all. I commend people who had the courage to participate, and I commend the government, which had the courage to follow it through.

Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) (16:08) — We cannot be wilfully blind to exploitation. When all you have in life is your time and your labour, you are vulnerable. We hope that the Australian fair go will prevail, but when it does not, we have to step up and we have to protect people who are left in such vulnerable circumstances, where they have a precarious lifestyle, to be able to get work, raise their families and have the dignity that that brings to their lives. Preventing exploitation is in the public interest, it is good for

workers and it is also good for business. If you are a reputable firm, you have nothing to be concerned about. What this legislation does — and I want to commend the minister for all of her work in delivering this comprehensive bill — is get rid of the dodgy operators. The evidence that this needs to happen is incontrovertible.

What we have seen, particularly during the media exposure on these issues for a number of years now, is that workers have been exploited. *Four Corners*, the ABC program that I used to work for, my former employer, exposed the dark side of the local food industry particularly, in which thousands of young workers were kept in, and I quote, 'slave-like conditions', grossly underpaid and subjected to abuse.

Then we had the Andrews Labor government setting up the inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, and it conducted a rigorous investigation. The inquiry discovered a culture of exploitation in an industry that has been left unregulated for too long, and this bill redresses that situation. It cracks down on the dodgy operators, and it protects Victorian workers. This is the heart of the issue. The inquiry found that rogue operators were underpaying workers, not ensuring proper safety standards, abusing worker visas and undermining the minimum standards of employment.

So I say to the coalition you should be supporting this. This is clearly in the public interest. By not being here, by not making contributions and by voting against it do you not understand what is going on in our community? Do you not understand the issues about the working poor, people who are struggling? What is happening has been raised with the National Party by the people in rural communities, where you are vulnerable, just the same as you are in the city.

That is why this bill matters, and that is why it is an important piece of legislation. The arguments that have been proffered by opposition members miss the key point. It is not to be ideological; it is to be practical. It is not to be driven by a view that might help your factional advancement. It is to look after the advancement of the people who need good government and who need protection. I want to again emphasise the role that this government plays in protecting people, taking care of their best interests, helping them when they are vulnerable, giving them a hand up, not a handout, and giving them a better chance in life. That is why we have government. That is why we are here.

The Victorian inquiry recommended that the Victorian government advocate for a national approach, and this is what has been done. It has become clear that the

federal government has no intention of developing a national labour hire licensing scheme. It is a sorry day when they do not see what is going on, because the case is well-established. There have not been arguments against the facts of the matter.

The Andrews government has raised this with the Turnbull federal government repeatedly, but they still refuse to act. They have no interest in standing up for working people, and they will not take a stand against exploitation. This goes to the critical issue of the public interest and of mutual obligation. Many a time I have heard mutual obligation being recited by the Australian government. What are the obligations of individuals and the requirements? By definition, it cuts both ways. What is the Australian government doing to actually stop exploitation? What are they doing for areas like the area I represent, Broadmeadows, where there are people who have underwritten prosperity for generations with their will and their wit and their manufacturing nous and where we are going through deindustrialisation? I have identified an unspent \$1.324 billion in one of the automotive transformation schemes, and they still do not want to reinvest any of that in the area where it is needed the most. When they talk about a jobs and growth election strategy, here is where we want you to be a participant and not a bystander.

This goes to the ideological barriers that everyday people do not want to know about and do not care about. They just want to be able to get a good job, get fair pay, take care of their children and give them a better opportunity in life. These are the fundamental core values that define a fair go within this country, which has been a hallmark that has stood us in good stead. You can compare and contrast that with what happens in the US, where you have gated communities. In Melbourne we do not want to see the Yarra and the Maribyrnong as moats. We do not want to see people being in different positions, whether they come from the south and the east or the north and the west. We do not want our community divided in this way, as we have seen in other countries. These are fundamental core values that this piece of legislation addresses.

I say to the National Party, there have been major industry players who acknowledge that there is a problem, like Ausveg. They have said that better regulation of labour hire companies is well overdue. The deputy chief executive, Andrew White, said:

At the moment, it's a free-for-all, you've got very little regulation, if any ...

Labour hire contractors constantly provide a vital service for the horticultural sector but unscrupulous firms damage the entire industry.

That is the rub, right there. That is what this legislation does. It puts new scrutiny, accountability and compliance on the dodgy people who are unscrupulous and are damaging entire industries.

I say to the Liberal Party, even if you see yourself as a party of business rather than the whole community, you should be governing — if you ever win the right to govern again — for the entire community. There is the point. If you were sticking up for business, you would be supporting this bill. That is the clear logic of it. You want to get rid of the unscrupulous operators who give industries a bad name.

Likewise the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has also gone after the unscrupulous labour hire contractors and they support labour hire regulation. I quote again from Peter Tuohey:

The Victorian government has pledged to regulate all labour hire companies, a move supported by the VFF.

The logic is clear. The case has been made. The evidence is incontrovertible. There has not been an argument from the opposition. In fact, if you have a look, they have effectively vacated the Parliament for this debate. As I look across the chamber, there is not one member of the Liberal Party in this chamber. This is a disgrace. They are not here. They need to be here, and they need to address it. They need to have somebody representing them in the chamber.

I do want to also in the remaining time address an issue that has happened in my electorate. I want to look at what happens when big companies leave a community. Woolworths have said that they are going to leave Broadmeadows after having had a long-established relationship there with a distribution centre, and that is going to shed up to 680 full-time, part-time and casual jobs. I have spoken to Woolworths executives about the way that that was done as well. They held a meeting on a Friday — they flew in from Sydney — and if you were not at that meeting, you got an SMS message that you were going to be made redundant. I think we need to actually look at how we treat the relationships, how we take care of workers and how we give people a fair go, because this will be the making of the future for our country.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) (16:18) — I wish to say a few words about the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. I am probably one of the few people in this house who has actually been hired out to a number of companies in a labour hire sense when I was a tradesman's assistant working at V. P. Hawthorne in Sunshine. We did a range of work, and many of my friends and colleagues

were hired out to a number of companies ranging from CSR in Yarraville to Mobil in Yarraville. Some of these people were hired out for long periods of time. I worked at BASF in one of my first jobs in 1977 and 1978 under labour hire through V. P. Hawthorne. So I have got direct experience of the labour hire industry within the metal industry and of some of the problems that were experienced back then in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I was on the tools. David Lloyd owned the company and Ron Stembridge was one of the managers there. They looked after the workers, because they made sure that we worked and that we got paid appropriately. Just for the record, Ron Stembridge was a lovely bloke. He passed away a number of years ago. We got paid properly, our conditions of work were correct, and the health and safety was correct. They did send a couple of us out to Deer Park to de-lag some asbestos, but in the main they looked after us.

They were competing against other labour hire companies. It was very unionised. The labour hire companies in the metal trades industry were quite regulated because of the strong trade union presence in those companies. But there are instances where some labour hire companies undercut the very good companies. The good companies that are providing the conditions, the payments and the wages for their people cannot compete because the shonks come into the industry and they undercut all that. They make their people work in very unsafe conditions, underpay them and genuinely do not treat them right, which is not what we should be about. It is not what a Parliament should be about in a First World country.

You find that in a number of areas where unless you have this floor you have other companies and other people coming in — unscrupulous people — doing the wrong thing by their workers. Particularly in this day of de-unionisation where a lot of people are not in unions, do not understand the role of unions and are not covered by unions, you actually need a floor to protect, as my friend from Broadmeadows has said, the workers that are being hired by labour hire.

I have been listening to the debate over the last two days and I do not take the Ayn Rand view of the world. I do not think that that is appropriate for this type of legislation, which is balanced and measured, whereas the laissez faire system is one of going for the lowest common denominator. If companies are contracted to do a job and provide people to do that job, then there must be a system of regulation that protects not only the people working at the coalface but a system that also protects the companies. That is the thing that I do not understand about the Liberal Party or the National Party in this sense, because it is actually about providing that

floor and providing the standards for companies to operate within a market that is regulated and is not corrupted. Within a purely laissez-faire system, a purely capitalist system, you do not have that floor. You do not have that oversight and regulation. You have a system where people will just undercut each other for the purpose of getting a contract and then abusing their workers. I do not think that is what our society and our community are about.

I also heard that this is about the trade unions taking control. As I said, the issue certainly in the metal trades industry is that it is quite strongly regulated, but this bill is not about providing memberships or preference for union members. This is about providing protections for people that are in these particular situations. You can bring up a straw man argument all the way through as a conservative Tory, but when you actually have a look at the legislation and read it, there is nothing in there that says that people will have to be unionised. They should be unionised to protect themselves, but there is nothing in this legislation to say that they should be unionised. There is nothing in this legislation that says that it gives preference to union members. It is about providing that level playing field for the good operators, the good companies, in the industry. That balance is extremely important.

Clause 22 even goes further in terms of the requirements for a fit and proper person. It talks about indictable offences, fraud, dishonesty and drug trafficking. Why wouldn't you want to support a piece of legislation that says that companies or people that are involved in this industry ought to be fit and proper people? Why would you want drug traffickers, fraudsters, people with a dishonest background running these types of companies? It is beyond me.

VCAT is the jurisdiction for the matters in this particular piece of legislation. It is a low-cost jurisdiction. It is a quick jurisdiction. Again it assists the companies and it assists the licensing authority when there may be disputes.

Clause 50 defines the Labour Hire Licensing Authority and also talks about developing the industry code of conduct. When you are looking at a laissez-faire capitalist system, if the industry itself can work through these issues, we are all much better for it, and it means that that floor is agreed to by the companies and the people that operate within the industry. That is what this legislation encourages. On that basis I support the legislation before the house. I think it is necessary. The evidence that honourable members have talked about is overwhelming, and I think it will assist people working

in the labour hire area into the future, so I support the bill before the house.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (16:28) — I rise this afternoon to speak on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. It has been an interesting couple of days listening to some of the arguments from both sides of the house. Firstly, even though we did not catch up, thank you to Madeleine from the minister's office for providing me with some information on the bill. That was most helpful.

As many members have outlined, way back in October 2015 Professor Anthony Forsyth began a pretty comprehensive analysis of the labour hire sector in Victoria. As I understand it, there were around 695 submissions. A number of public hearings were held across the state, including in the good electorate of Morwell. There were around 221 individual witnesses, and the inquiry culminated in 35 recommendations.

I will put on record at the start that anyone who deliberately exploits workers should be held fully accountable and receive appropriate punishment. It is an open argument on both sides of the house, with one side saying they look after workers, but I think everybody in the chamber sincerely agrees that any exploitation of workers crosses the line for every single member of this house and each person in the community.

Whilst the bill provides one way to make improvements to the current situation, there are a diverse range of views and opinions on how that should be done. I think when you have a look at the submissions that came through to this particular inquiry that was undertaken by Professor Forsyth, there is no doubt that there are workers in our state who unfortunately have some horrible stories to tell. I repeat that any business or enterprise that does wrong by those workers should be held fully accountable before the law.

Whilst this bill puts in place a licensing regime and a legal framework around that, it is interesting to learn, whether you are an employee, whether you are part of a union or whether you are a business, what your feelings and sentiments are about. I will go into that in a bit more detail during my contribution.

In her contribution the member for Brunswick talked about balance, and that is a thing that I will speak about a little bit. As members of Parliament you get feedback on various parts of legislation, good, bad or otherwise, and this is probably one piece of legislation on which I have had workers and unions contact me and ask for support. Businesses, and particularly very credible labour hire businesses, expressed some concern about

the arrangements that are put in place. I support any legislation that provides improvement to workers, whether that is regarding health and safety or whether that is regarding work and pay conditions.

In legislation we put through we have also got to make sure there are no unintended consequences. I am not in favour of over-regulating businesses, because I think at the end of the day it can have an adverse effect. We do not want to over-regulate business so that they simply do not employ people because it is too onerous for them.

In his contribution the member for Broadmeadows talked about the government helping workers and helping people. That is all good, but I think if you live in the Morwell electorate at the moment you will understand the irony in that. When we are talking about workers and employment, unfortunately what we have seen in the Morwell electorate is a massive increase in unemployment in the last three years or so. With the closure of Hazelwood power station and the Carter Holt Harvey timber mill it is probably a bit grating for many people and workers in the Latrobe Valley when they hear some of the commentary about how we stand up for workers. The fact is that we have had two major businesses close. Many blue-collar workers and many low-income people who are relatively low skilled when you talk about Carter Holt Harvey workers have lost their jobs. That impact is being felt in our community right now, and not just directly by those workers at the power station or the timber mill but also within the community of timber and coal-related businesses that relied upon those operations to continue.

I have listened to contributions from all sides, and I understand Labor members and others are talking about the virtues of the bill, but at the same time from my personal perspective within my electorate it is a very, very challenging time for people to find work. Unemployment is a massive issue.

As I said before, when you have legislation that people might have different views on, it is interesting to hear some of the comments. I did have some feedback from local unions and local workers who asked for support for the bill and also from a labour hire business. They posed a number of relevant questions that went to the core of the bill. I quote:

Why hasn't the current government done more to ensure all employers are paying their employees correctly if this is such a problem?

There is current a Fair Work ombudsman to ensure workplace harmony, is this —

what we are doing in Victoria —

a double-up of resources?

Will the impact of licensing diminish employment within the Latrobe Valley? Horticulture, mining, cleaning, manufacturing and transport are all high labour hire industries, these are also industries that the valley cannot afford to shrink, will the added cost of labour hire licensing have an impact on jobs?

If the current government is so passionate about ensuring casual employment is limited, are they prepared for an increase in unemployment rates when employers choose to not increase their workforce during peak times due to the added costs of licensing?

A cheaper way to protect workers being exploited is to enforce the current employment laws that are already in place for all Victorian employers!

There you go. As I said, I understand the intentions of the government. There are some horror stories for workers across the state, and nobody can deny that. I support any improvement to legislation that protects workers, but on the other hand I remain a little bit concerned about the impact it might have on businesses and also their ability to employ people.

Mr FOLEY (Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing) (16:36) — It gives me great pleasure to rise to make a brief contribution, given the level of enthusiasm on this side of the chamber to speak, on this groundbreaking, millennium-making bill, the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. This bill, as members of this side have reflected on, comes about through an exhaustive and thoroughly consultative process for which I congratulate the Minister for Industrial Relations on her work and her leadership. This bill reflects some deep-seated changes in the labour market — changes that are not new and changes that fortunately the Andrews Labor government has shown leadership on in catching up with the regulatory frame that we should bring to this vast, sprawling and largely beyond the pale area of labour hire regulation.

As the member for Melton indicated, many labour hire organisations do the right thing. But far too many do not because of the disaggregation of what was once a thoroughly comprehensive safety net of minimum conditions. This has been progressively unwound by a series of arrangements which, under the guise of workplace efficiency and flexibility, have largely seen the powerless, the unorganised and those in economic or geographically vulnerable professions, organisations and workplaces have their employment conditions put at risk as the tidal wave of labour deregulation has engulfed us over the last generation.

It is in labour hire particularly that we see this play out — it is in labour hire that we see the worst excesses play out. Many members on this side have pointed in

particular to the issues in the food and food production sectors, particularly in regional and peri-urban Victoria, and we have seen raids on all sorts of organisations, whether it be through immigration processes or indeed by unions — indeed in some cases the regulatory agencies of the federal wage-setting bodies. But those organisations are so thinly stretched, so vast in their call, that the role for the state when the market fails has been well and truly established. This bill screams to be passed in what should be a civilised 21st century Victoria when we seek to raise the safety net, when we seek to raise the bar under which the most vulnerable and exploited workers are potentially at risk.

So when we see some opposition to this bill, we wonder why. We wonder why you could oppose, in this 21st century, those kinds of safety nets for the most vulnerable. Is it because there is self-interest at play? Is it because of raids on particular primary producers that may or may not have very close relationships with, for instance, prominent Liberal Party donors or those that would seek to host prominent leaders of the opposition? Is that in fact a motivation?

We would hope not. We would hope that in a civilised 21st century there would be a much better arrangement that we could come to as a Parliament. And this Parliament has a long and proud tradition of setting the benchmarks here. In the early 20th century it set the benchmarks around minimum award conditions well before the commonwealth moved into the area. In the 19th century it made similar arrangements. Now in the 21st century it falls to us to show that leadership, to show that commitment to protecting those who have a changing, globalised work environment. Whether it is immigration, whether it is vulnerable workers or whether indeed it is people with disabilities in some of my own portfolio areas, when people are exposed to exploitation it is up to the regulatory agency of the state to act. If the commonwealth declines to act in a case that should be a national approach, then it is only right and proper that the state fills that gap.

This is a very good bill. It is one of which I am immensely proud, and I just despair, frankly, as to why those opposite are not supporting it. I just hope raids on very significant primary producers that have links to prominent Liberal Party donors and allegedly serious organised crime figures are not a motivating factor. But sometimes silence is deafening, and all we are hearing in this debate from those opposite is that silence, and that speaks volumes as to how perhaps we need to frame this particular debate, not just in this place but in the wider community. It is with those few brief comments that I might leave my contribution there, knowing that there are many others in this place who

are very keen to add their contributions to this important bill.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (16:41) — I rise to make my contribution to the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017. This is a bill that will establish a universal licensing system for labour hire service providers in order to provide transparency and integrity for the labour hire industry, and it aims to protect vulnerable workers from exploitative practices by ensuring labour hire providers meet a fit and proper person test, comply fully with their legal obligations and face criminal charges for alleged breaches. I note this bill was drafted in response to the final report of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, which was tabled in Parliament in October 2016. This inquiry achieved significant engagement during the consultation, with almost 700 written submissions, more than 100 public hearing sessions and evidence from more than 200 individual witnesses. A number of these submissions took place in my electorate of Shepparton. It is a region well known for its horticultural industry and in particular its use of seasonal workers for tasks such as fruit picking, packing and other farm work responsibilities.

I will say at the outset that I will be supporting the passage of this bill through this place, and I am pleased to see the government address many of the issues that have arisen. The problems that we have been trying to solve have created a significant impact in regional areas. While it is a concern to me as someone who ran a business for a long time that we are actually creating a layer of red tape here, on balance I think it is one that is necessary to protect vulnerable workers. I know employers have the burden of payroll, of WorkSafe, of superannuation — a whole range of things that create a great deal of red tape, and a lot of work has been done in that area to try and mitigate that, to try and reduce the red tape — and here we are creating a new licensing authority as a way of licensing these contractors but, as I say, I think it is necessary.

In my electorate of Shepparton, while they are mostly law-abiding farmers and contract providers, it is not uncommon to hear whispers of dodgy practices. Several of these experiences were detailed in the inquiry, giving a welcome voice to those who for a long time felt that they had not been helped in any way with their predicament. I have had young people come into my office in recent years talking about the requirement that they had to have their accommodation deducted from their wages and saying they were required to live in really gross physical circumstances that are crowded and difficult with no

transport into town — arrangements that are just wholly unacceptable at this time.

One submission alleged a Goulburn Valley labour hire contractor had underpaid 13 people almost \$3000 after they had worked on a tomato farm near Tatura in 2015. The information was provided to the inquiry by a Tallygaroopna farmer on behalf of workers who were of African descent. Some of them really could not speak English that well, and they did not feel comfortable giving that evidence on their own behalf, but the farmer did it for them. Speaking to a local newspaper, the *Shepparton News*, three of the workers said that they were contracted by the contractor and that they had been in a situation where they had been contracted and had not been paid for several days of their work. The contractor came to their house and said that he would pay them. He had an argument with them about how much they were paid, and he never showed up again, so they were left high and dry.

Another submission detailed the experience of two Taiwanese workers who were paid \$14 an hour, cash in hand, at a farm in Shepparton, and that was some \$7.62 less than the legal minimum in the horticulture industry at that time. Evidence given by the National Union of Workers also alleged questionable visa practices by labour hire companies, suggesting it was quite common for contractors to offer to sign off on extending working holiday-maker visas to lure people to the region, only to disappear after the work was completed and in some cases not have the authority to do what they said they would do.

It should be pointed out, as other members have already done, that this is a problem across the state, and it is certainly not unique to Shepparton. In the past several years stories have emerged of systematic worker exploitation in farming communities, and we have seen a number of raids and enforcement of the law in this area in recent years, which I think have had some impact on perhaps reducing the extent of that abuse.

The stories tell of workers being duded by contractors stitching them up for rent and transport fees, which are often deducted from their low wages before the money even hits their pockets, and of workers who are packed to the rafters in old houses or shabby rooms above local pubs, waiting to be ferried to and from farm worksites, and who are often working long days — longer than they should. They are charged often exorbitantly for the accommodation arrangements that they get. Quite frankly this is the thing you hear about happening in other countries, not in Australia, and certainly it should not be happening here. Most workers do not complain about it. They tolerate bad conditions because they fear

the consequences. They could often be really stranded if they were to complain and find themselves in a situation where they are not being paid. They are often trying to send money home to their families who are totally reliant on it for their wellbeing.

It is important to protect the rights of these vulnerable workers, and they are entitled to the same working conditions as all Australians when they are in our country. It is the way it is. I know the horticultural industry certainly faces a great deal of competition internationally and in other countries. These horticultural workers are paid a pittance, and it does create issues of competition for Australian farmers to have to be in a position where they are paying a full and decent wage and then selling on a market where people are being paid a couple of dollars an hour in Chile, in Mexico and in countries throughout Asia that they are in competition with. That can be a real challenge, but it is the law of this country that people are entitled to that level of protection.

The nature of contracting often means that farmers themselves are at arms-length from the really unsatisfactory arrangements, and I believe that this law really creates a measure of protection not only for the worker but also for the farmers. Generally speaking, it is safe to say they do not want to be associated with those sorts of exploitative practices.

It is also important to look at the knock-on effect of these sorts of practices, and there is a knock-on effect to farming industries and that is another reason to remedy it. The agriculture and horticulture industry, in particular, is inherently reliant on seasonal workers, and reputational damage by stories such as we heard before the inquiry and more broadly should not be underestimated. We saw the damage that was done during the backpackers debate in federal Parliament, and I can say from my own personal experience that it is apparent that that did have an impact on getting the number of workers into this country that we need at times. That sort of reputational damage does us no good. Similarly the exploitation of workers would easily have the same effect.

We are often referred to as the food bowl of Australia in the Goulburn Valley. In terms of fruit production, we produce 86 per cent of pears, 28 per cent of the nation's apple harvest and 70 per cent of the national peach crop. While for most of the year the fruit is growing quietly on the trees and farming families or just a few employees are needed to look after it, when the fruit ripens you need a whole lot of people there to pick it, to pick it quickly and to get it to market, so reliance on

that particular seasonal workforce is really very important and essential.

As I said before, in Shepparton I remember many years of walking through the supermarket and seeing so many young backpackers. They are tanned, they are up early in the morning, they are out working in the hot sun and they are often swimming in the lake in the late afternoon and camping around the lake. It is a sort of culture that was a very lovely culture for Shepparton to have, and I am sure that extended throughout many other communities that rely on seasonal workers. There has been a lot of change. The countries that they come from now are different countries, and I think we have lost a lot of European backpackers for a number of reasons. I do not doubt that the backpacker tax issue contributed to that in some way.

The consequences for the economic future of our communities if farmers are left high and dry, in terms of not getting that group of people to come in and do the seasonal work, would be really drastic. Of course agriculture is not the only industry that is impacted by concerns around labour hire, so I am pleased that the recommendations actually extend to other sectors. It is not only horticulture, but it is also contract cleaning and the meat industries. They experience some of the same issues. I support the bill.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:52) — A significant number of bills come into this house each and every year, and some of those bills reveal the values of particular political movements. This bill today shows exactly how the oldest political party, the Australian Labor Party, puts workers at the forefront of everything we do. The exploitation of workers, the systemic abuse of those who are among the most vulnerable people in our society, cannot go unchecked. This legislation, the Labour Hire Licensing Bill 2017, corrects horrific wrongs.

All people, whether they be international workers or Australian citizens, are entitled to work that is secure and safe, and this should be the paramount focus of every government. But the opposition in opposing this bill have shown that they care more about politics. The paucity of the points put forward by the member for Box Hill and the member of the Murray Plains and their use of rhetoric when speaking on this bill have revealed their values.

I listened to the contribution of the member for Box Hill yesterday, and I want to contest the point he made when he said there should not be widespread application of regulation over the labour hire industry. That statement does not stand up to logic. It is the same

as saying, 'We only regulate speeding offences for those who speed'. There needs to be widespread coverage. How else can you guarantee that no industry has exploitation? The notion of a piecemeal approach to this issue is absurd. It needs to be widespread, and it needs to be consistent. Then there will be a level playing field for all labour hire businesses. I think that was an error in judgement by the member for Box Hill, although it was in the context of a speech that was attempting to demonise unions.

The work of the union movement and its representation of people across Victoria and across Australia is borne out in this bill. I want to put on record my appreciation of the work of the National Union of Workers, which represents some of these communities. If you look at the speeches made by the member for Box Hill and the member for Murray Plains, much of their time was spent on union bashing rather than reflecting on the severe abuse of workers, whether it be through exploitation, whether it be through a failure to provide them with adequate pay and conditions or whether it be through offences relating to sexual misconduct. The absence of any comment on these issues is in stark contrast to the values of the Australian Labor Party, and that is why the workers movement can only ever be represented by the Australian Labor Party.

The member for Essendon also revealed the hypocrisy of the Greens political party. They are no friends of workers, and the fact that they have not made any contribution on this legislation is greatly disappointing. They should have contributed to the debate. This is a very serious issue, and there are widespread concerns. Media coverage of the issue has revealed that organised crime is involved in labour hire companies that have exploited workers. You could not get any more serious than this. This is a systemic problem, and the fact that the third most dominant party in this Parliament has been absent from the debate on it is something that people should reflect on. The Greens should do better.

We will protect these workers, and we will protect future migrants to our country who are looking for an opportunity to work. Some of them hope that eventually they will gain work visas and they will go on to live in Australia permanently. That is the Australian dream, and a number of migrants have followed work visas through to becoming permanent residents. The notion that that dream and that aspiration would be exploited by criminal gangs or unscrupulous businesses is abhorrent. Those opposite should reflect on how important this legislation is rather than indulging in their traditional and predictable tactics of union bashing.

I commend the bill to the house.

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) (16:56) — It is actually with sadness that I rise to speak on this bill, because this legislation should actually be before the federal Parliament. The federal government should have stood up with pride and said, 'We will defend the rights of workers'. If ever you needed a justification for trade unions, this is it. The work of the National Union of Workers to ensure that this issue was uncovered was seminal, and the work of the ABC in exposing the issue was also very important. All credit to the Minister for Industrial Relations for acting on it so swiftly by setting up the Forsyth review. She made sure this issue was out in the open once and for all.

This is an issue that we have all known about but some people have not been prepared to confront: the exploitation of workers, not just monetarily and not just in occupational health and safety but through depriving them of proper housing and proper transport and in many cases involving abuse. No worker should have to put up with that, and particularly no worker in Australia. The fact that this legislation is in this Parliament is an absolute indictment of the federal government. This legislation also mirrors the legislation in Queensland and South Australia to deal with these issues. I am so proud to be part of a Labor government that recognises we have a responsibility to workers who are vulnerable.

I have heard this notion about the additional regulation of employers. Let us be clear about this: this is a licensing scheme that puts no additional regulation on employers. What it is requiring them to do is meet the regulations that they are supposed to do under legislation now — nothing more, nothing less. That is why it is so important that this legislation is passed. We need to ensure that the shonks and the rogues and the criminals are no longer in the labour hire business and that people who actually undertake to work under labour hire do so knowing that they have got the full weight of the law behind them. They are going to have the full weight of the state government behind them, and we are going to make sure that their rights are protected.

If the federal government really cared about the workers of this country, they would be legislating tomorrow to ensure that they are protecting the rights of workers under the legislation that already exists. All we are asking for is that workers are able to live under the conditions set by federal and state laws and that they are not abused — that they are living safe, productive lives, knowing they are getting the right wage and they have got the right occupational health and safety conditions to work in so they can go home safe at night, that they do not have the added expense of transport and housing costs that they were told would be covered

by their employer and that they are not facing abuse within the workplace. That is what this bill does.

I am very proud to be part of a Labor government that has brought this legislation into the house. I fully support the legislation.

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

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 45

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

Noes, 33

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

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(VICTIMS) BILL 2017**

Second reading

Debate resumed from 6 February; motion of Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General).

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Second reading

Debate resumed from 7 February; motion of Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General).

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(VICTIMS) BILL 2017**

Clerk's amendment

The SPEAKER (17:06) — I advise the house that, under standing order 81, I have received a report from the Acting Clerk that she has made the following correction in the Justice Legislation Amendment (Victims) Bill 2017:

In clause 23, subsection (1), delete '(3)' and insert '(3B)'.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Barwon Heads Road duplication

Mr KATOS (South Barwon) (17:07) — (13 965)
My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action that I seek is for the minister to immediately intervene in VicRoads' intention to remove \$6 million worth of existing signalised intersections as part of the future Barwon Heads Road duplication. There are times as a politician when you get things that come across your desk that really make you think it is April Fools' Day, and this proposal by VicRoads is certainly one of them.

The present intersections of Barwon Heads Road and Warralily Boulevard, Armstrong Creek and Barwon Heads Road, and the entry to Warralily Village shopping centre are presently signalised and allow for the future duplication of Barwon Heads Road at those intersections. Both these intersections were previously approved by the City of Greater Geelong and VicRoads and were installed by the developers at a cost of \$6 million. Now, in an extraordinary decision by VicRoads from their desktops in Kew, they wish to rip up and remove these \$6 million worth of signalised intersections and replace them with two roundabouts as part of a future duplicated Barwon Heads Road at a cost of an additional \$5 million.

To make this proposal even more ridiculous, the proposed roundabout at the entry to the Warralily shopping centre actually cuts through the corner of an existing building. This is the artist's impression that I am holding, but it is actually built now. It will actually have the corner acquired and have to be ripped up as well, which is just absurd.

Mr Robert Lane, who is the director of the Catarina Property Group, has written to me highlighting how ridiculous this proposal is. In the letter he wrote:

Local residents, developers, the business community and investors are astonished at this proposal ...

He has listed some of the concerns, which I have raised.

Basically, the precinct structure plan approved in 2010 showed that these intersections are signalised intersections, and the developers have adhered to everything. Now we have VicRoads extraordinarily wanting to rip up these intersections. It is just quite incredible. These signalised intersections are certainly serving the community well, and they were already

designed to accommodate the future duplication of Barwon Heads Road.

This proposal by VicRoads to rip up existing traffic lights and replace them with roundabouts would have to be one of the silliest proposals I have seen in my time as an elected official. It is something befitting, really, of a Monty Python sketch. This is the sort of government waste that taxpayers absolutely loathe. Minister, I ask you to immediately intervene and stop VicRoads's plan to rip up \$6 million of existing traffic lights to replace them with roundabouts.

Ballarat Road, Albion, traffic lights

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (17:10) — (13 966)
My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is that the minister give serious consideration to providing funding for the installation of traffic lights at Perth Avenue, Chatsworth Avenue and Hulett Street along Ballarat Road, Albion, in the upcoming budget cycle. These intersections are a safety concern not only for motorists but also for locals, pedestrians and the school community. I have listened to the concerns of my residents, and I have also attended a public rally. I have met with VicRoads on a number of occasions to discuss the potential safety issues at these intersections. VicRoads has investigated and agrees that the lack of traffic lights is a safety issue and supports the proposed installation. I know that the minister is deeply concerned for the safety of all Victorians on our roads.

The action I seek, as I said, is for favourable consideration to be given to the proposal. It will not only address the safety concerns, which I previously outlined, for the school community but also for the local traders and local community, and that includes the Sunshine mosque, the retirement village on Ballarat Road and of course the many community centres in Albion. These three intersections in particular are at the moment very dangerous. The ability not only for motorists but also for pedestrians to access public transport is of particular high concern. I call on the minister, as I have previously stated, to make funds available in the upcoming Victorian budget.

Ouyen railway sidings

Mr CRISP (Mildura) (17:12) — (13 967) I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. The action I seek is for her to commit to providing a container siding at the Ouyen railyards. The history of this is that Ouyen was a major rail junction and major rail town in the past, and there were six sidings in the Ouyen rail yards. As part of the Murray

Basin rail project, that was reduced to four sidings. Because of the long lead times of the project, the consultation occurred some years ago about the siding needs, which have in fact now changed with the changes that have occurred within the 50 or more kilometres of the Ouyen yards. There has been correspondence with the minister about this particular issue, in particular to request that the minister not remove one of the two sidings that were scheduled for removal. That removal has now occurred.

It is also interesting to note that Ouyen Inc., which is the representative for the Ouyen community in this matter, has also written to Darren Chester, the federal member for Gippsland, who suggested that there ought to be discussions with V/Line and the other partners of the Murray Basin rail project. So certainly I want to pay tribute to the work done in this area by Ouyen Inc. and Michael O'Callaghan, who have been working with the community to promote this.

Now that the sidings have been removed, those involved want to get the minister to facilitate enhancing one of the remaining sidings for container loading. The opportunity for container traffic, which has changed in recent years, is grain. Grain marketing has become less centralised, and there are now large operations containerising grain. There are a couple of operators in the Ouyen area that have expressed interest in this.

The almond industry is going very well. It is considerable in its exports. There is a very large almond orchard that is planning a hulling and shelling plant that will be closer to Ouyen than to Mildura, so it could well load its export almonds there. And of course there are some mineral sands left in the area, which often go overseas for processing, and that has been known to happen at Ouyen. Also in Robinvale table grapes is very much a growing industry.

What they are asking for is something that can hold up to twelve 80-foot wagons on a siding. They have identified the east side as being preferable. They really think that now would be an ideal time to undertake this work while the Murray Basin rail project is active in the area and the contractors are available. This would be a minor but valuable addition to that project, which would move our product overseas via our ports as effectively and economically as possible.

Broadmeadows electorate employment

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (17:15) — (13 968) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Industry and Employment. The action I seek is for the minister to provide advice on how the

Andrews Labor government's \$68 million Jobs Victoria initiative can be used to assist the unemployed people of the Broadmeadows electorate under my local jobs for local people strategy.

I have identified an estimated 266 jobs predicted to be needed in the next year. They are jobs in the booming caravan construction industry, including caravan assemblers, electricians, plumbers, production managers, engineers and administrative workers — that is according to a key industry representative with whom I have had a meeting and then further discussions about why this is not just important for the industry but also as a locally based proposition. The caravan industry's epicentre is Campbellfield, where of course the Ford Motor Company's once iconic assembly lines producing passenger vehicles have fallen silent, so there could also be an opportunity there for new jobs for ex-auto workers.

In the same vein, I want to raise the proposition that another locally based company, Kingspan, have commissioned an innovative approach to water management in Melbourne called the *Greater Melbourne Alternative Water Plan*. The plan is an innovative approach to efficient service delivery and employment growth in Melbourne. This is an Irish company that has relocated its headquarters to the suburb of Somerton. Again, this could help create good jobs for a local community where jobs are needed most. The plan has been commissioned by Kingspan Environmental, an international building materials company providing rainwater tanks, wastewater systems and insulation materials in Australia. They also export, using the location in Somerton as their hub for the Asia-Pacific region.

The plan is based on the values of fairness, transparency and public benefit. The key concern is that households and businesses have borne the cost of inefficient infrastructure decisions and have suffered as a result, and the plan is about providing better options for the future. The recommendation of the alternative plan is for new buildings in Victoria to meet energy and water-saving performance targets, and they have got a detailed plan to make that happen. This would be creating jobs where they are needed most. What Kingspan is doing is environmentally sensitive and for the public benefit.

Broadmeadows is also delivering new caravans and really good blue-collar and white-collar jobs in an area that is undergoing deindustrialisation and needs to get the benefit from it. I know this is a great strategy that the Andrews government has set up, and I just want to harness that.

Mentone railway station

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) (17:18) — (13 969) My adjournment debate matter is for the attention of the Minister for Police. The action I seek is for protective services officers to forthwith commence work at the Mentone railway station at 3.00 p.m. during the school year. Local secondary school principals have written to me in the following terms: Mentone station is a hub of activity at the end of the school day and is the central point for hundreds of students to gather and embark on transport home. The approximate enrolment numbers of the secondary schools in this area are as follows: Kilbreda College, 973 students; Mentone Girls Grammar, 840 students; Mentone Girls Secondary College, 1100 students; Mentone Grammar, 1600 students; Parkdale Secondary College, 1300 students; and St Bede's College, 1564 students. Effectively there are over 6000 secondary students within a short distance of each other.

With large volumes of students and members of the public using Mentone station from 3.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. it has been reported to me that safety at times can be compromised. For many years Kilbreda College has allocated staff members to assist with moving students on to avoid congestion and for student safety. There have been some incidents involving undesirable behaviour from members of the public and also times when Kilbreda staff have assisted students from other schools. I am advised that it is not the college's responsibility to do this, and out of concern for the safety and wellbeing of staff members Kilbreda will no longer have a staff presence at the station.

Due to the extremely large volume of students utilising Mentone station and congregating in its vicinity, it is requested that the Victorian government provide protective services officers at Mentone station from 3.00 p.m. onwards on school days. This is a matter of student and public safety. This request is supported and endorsed by the principals of the local secondary schools, who share similar concerns about student and public safety at Mentone station at the end of the school day. The schools supporting this measure include Kilbreda College, Mentone Girls Grammar, Mentone Grammar, Parkdale Secondary College and St Bede's College. My support has been sought to make this request on behalf of the schools to the Victorian government and to the minister. The principals believe that this issue deserves immediate attention to ensure the safety of students and members of the public using Mentone station.

African-Australian community

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) (17:21) — (13 970) I direct my adjournment debate matter to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is for the minister to convene a meeting between his department, his office, myself and the local African-Australian community leaders from the state district of Essendon to discuss how the adoption of the African action plan will assist African-Australian communities in my electorate.

Melton electorate roads

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) (17:21) — (13 971) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is that the intersection of Melton Highway, Sunshine Avenue and the Old Calder Highway be signalised and the roundabouts at these intersections removed. The *Melway* reference is map 14A2.

Many of my residents use the Melton Highway, which used to be called the Keilor-Melton Road, for work or social connections. The road has been upgraded by Labor governments — and only Labor governments — with the latest upgrade being the terrific bridge and level crossing removal at the Sydenham railway crossing, which opened last week. This dangerous level crossing was totally removed. Now we still have the dangerous set of intersections where motorists come off the Calder Freeway into the roundabout or from Melton, Sydenham and Taylors Lakes where it just jams up, especially in peak times.

There have been numerous accidents and near misses at these intersections because of the amount of traffic and the schools in the area, including the Catholic Regional College. You have also got the shopping centre there and McDonald's as well. The dangerous nature of the intersection has hit home to me with my electorate officer having had two accidents. Luckily she was not injured, but there are a lot more accidents that occur there on a daily basis. There is also the pedestrian crossing on the western side of the roundabout on the Melton Highway that just jams up the traffic and causes problems for motorists and pedestrians as it is too close to the roundabout. It is also not coordinated and I fear for the kids and their parents who use it. There is another pedestrian crossing between the Old Calder Highway and the Melton Highway that also jams up. Between the two roundabouts it jams up the motorists and the intersections as well.

There have been petitions with over 40 000 signatures to get these roundabouts signalised due to their

dangerous nature and the congestion that they cause. In the morning motorists can get a good run, relatively, all the way from Melton until they hit the Sunshine Avenue–Melton Highway roundabout, where it banks up through Taylors Lakes and even back to Sydenham. I know that my honourable friends for St Albans and Sydenham would also support the signalisation of these two intersections and the removal of the roundabouts for the safety and the congestion-busting measure that it is.

I urge the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to have a look at this and get VicRoads to do some work. The roundabout, when it was put in place a couple of decades ago, was appropriate at the time, but now it has outlived its usefulness. It needs to go because it is a safety problem.

Early childhood education

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:24) — (13 972) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Early Childhood Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to detail how the Victorian government is investing in early childhood education in my electorate and how the federal government, with the uncertainty around longer term education funding, is putting some of those policies at risk. Of course there was a landmark report that was handed down just recently called *Lifting Our Game*. It made some astonishing findings about the benefits of investing in some of the littlest Victorians in our community. It said that every dollar invested in early childhood education could derive a benefit in the longer term of between \$2 and \$4.

It also talked about the fact that having uncertainty around the contribution from the commonwealth to early childhood education — this relates to the 5 hours and 15 hours that were mandated under the national quality framework back in 2009 — hampers early childhood providers such as local kindergartens, both volunteer and private providers, and there needs to be greater funding certainty. Extraordinarily, the federal government a day later only committed to 12 months of early education funding, once again requiring those kindergartens, including those in my electorate, to plead and beg for that funding certainty in 12 months time. This has happened for years, where kinders contact me and say, ‘We can’t plan out our staffing, we can’t plan out what we will pay our educators with this uncertainty. It has to end’. It flies in the face of some of the contributions that we are making such as funding of over \$200 million for early childhood education, better preparing our youngest for their first year in school that is so fundamental. And of course there is the 15 hours mandated four-year-old kinder.

We need to do better in this space. The federal government needs to properly invest in the youngest people in our community. As the father of an 18-month-old baby — toddler; a toddler after 12 months, I am told — this is something that is at the forefront of my mind, and I share the concerns of local families in my community who expect better. We should be investing in our early childhood education where you see that every dollar invested returns \$2 to \$4 in economic outcome longer term. The fact that we are lagging behind international benchmarks in other countries means we need to do better. We see the investments in Chelsea Kindergarten, in Chelsea Heights Kindergarten and in Acacia Avenue Kindergarten and the investments we are making in educators. The Victorian government is doing well. We need the commonwealth to come on board. In conclusion, my adjournment matter is: how is the Victorian government investing in early childhood education in my electorate, and how is that put at risk by the federal government?

Bass electorate roads

Mr PAYNTER (Bass) (17:27) — (13 973) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to fund a roundabout at Back Beach Road on Phillip Island. Back Beach Road heads down to Smiths Beach and also to the MotoGP track. It is a dangerous intersection, particularly in the heavy traffic at times of major events during the year. If the last 12 months are anything to go by, VicRoads seems to have a fixation on tinkering with traffic through San Remo and Newhaven, much to the amusement, or frustration, of local residents and businesses.

It is acknowledged that traffic is a problem around the island at peak periods and when major events are held. Attempting to make alterations through San Remo and Newhaven will make absolutely no difference to the traffic flow in those particular areas. They are talking about dual lanes through Newhaven and adding a roundabout, which will cut off traffic turning right as it heads east to the businesses, so the businesses are unhappy. They are talking about taking up to 10 metres off the frontage of some residences and businesses, which are obviously clearly unhappy with that proposal.

They have come up with some options through San Remo, again with some notion that they will fix the traffic problems in the peak periods. That is simply not the case. They are making it a left-hand turn only option into San Remo and out of San Remo. If you are heading east and are attempting to use the businesses in San Remo, you will be forced to travel about

200 metres along the road to a set of traffic lights and then make a U-turn. That is simply not going to happen. The traffic will continue on out of the area and not use the businesses in San Remo. There does not seem to be any consensus at all that these proposals are a positive move forward for San Remo and Newhaven. VicRoads seem to be wasting taxpayers time and money by working on these proposals.

What really does need to be done is the roundabout at Back Beach Road, Smiths Beach, heading towards Smiths Beach needs to be funded. They also need to get on with building the roundabout which has been funded at Woolamai Beach Road and Back Beach Road, to stop messing around and creating issues that do not need to be fixed, and to get on with building the roundabout and the two traffic areas with problems that do exist. That is what the residents want and that is what the businesses want. What this government needs to do is to simply get on with fixing the problems that currently exist and to stop looking for problems that do not exist. They cut the country roads and bridges program, which is a problem for the entire state of Victoria. What they need to do is focus on getting on with business and improving our roads.

Glen Eira College

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (17:30) — (13 974) I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit my local community to meet with the Glen Eira College leadership group and students and to see firsthand the positive impact of the electronic speed signs which are scheduled to be installed outside the school on Booran Road in the next couple of months. From the outset I would like to thank the minister for his work in the road safety area. Most of the work is done without publicity but it is work that actually saves people's lives. The minister should be applauded for having a real passion in this space.

Glen Eira College is located on Booran Road in Caulfield East. It is a road that carries some 11 000 vehicles every weekday, so it is a very busy road. The school is growing, and we have invested over \$10 million in a major upgrade here too, so it is likely that there will be even more pedestrian movements in the future. The school is quite unique in that the school grounds exist on both sides of Booran Road, which means students need to cross from one side to the other throughout the school day. While there are pedestrian lights and 40-kilometre speed limits during the morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up, research has shown that many vehicles regularly exceed the speed limit. There have been numerous reports of pedestrian near misses

at this location. I have appreciated the meetings and discussions with the minister over the last couple of years and his diligence in ensuring that a change could be made at this location. Because it is a change, it will make a real difference.

In December it was fantastic to announce with a member for Southern Metropolitan Region, Philip Dalidakis, that electronic speed signs will be installed here, with a permanent 40-kilometre speed limit between 8.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. on school days. I would also like to pay tribute to the school principal, Sheereen Kindler, and her team, and the Glen Eira College school council, led very ably by the terrific Ruth Gordon. And I would like to thank the member for Caulfield, whose electorate this falls in, for his advocacy, including in this place. I also thank Glen Eira council and Victoria Police for assisting the government with this change. I look forward again to welcoming the minister in a few months time to see what this road safety fix means for our community and also perhaps to see the results of our Labor government's significant upgrade to Glen Eira College.

Mr Southwick — Hear, hear!

Responses

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) (17:32) — I thank the member for Mildura for raising in the adjournment tonight the matter of increased infrastructure around the Ouyen rail yards, and I do acknowledge that the member for Mildura has also written to me on this matter. I do understand the reason why he is very keen to capitalise on the Murray Basin rail freight project. It is a great project, a project that is being delivered by this Labor government, being further investment in upgrading the rail freight network across regional Victoria.

Of course it is only Labor governments that invest in the rail freight network across regional Victoria. For those of us with longer memories, we had to of course buy the network back when we were last in government after the failed privatisation of the rail freight network by the former Kennett Liberal-National government, which brought the network to its knees actually — for the member for Mordialloc's benefit. The network was in significant decline. We brought it back, pumped in investment and got Tim Fischer on board to undertake a review. We saw the upgrade of a number of lines under our previous government, and now it is this Labor government that is supporting and delivering the Murray Basin rail freight project.

Of course this is a great project, and the member for Mildura mentioned the almond industry and the table grape industry in his local area in particular. These are two good examples of why we need this project. We need this project so we can support our primary producers to get their product to market more quickly and more efficiently. Upgrading the lines to standard gauge and increasing the axle loading mean we can deliver those outcomes. We can deliver those outcomes where product gets to port. Whether it is the port of Melbourne, the port of Geelong or the port of Portland, it can get there more quickly and efficiently. We know in this game, in this industry, time is money, and this will provide significant efficiencies and returns for our primary producers and in turn also give them the opportunity to make increased investments in their local areas like that in the almond industry which the member referred to.

Also this is a project that is going to take 20 000 trucks off local roads. That is also a great outcome for local government as many of those roads are their responsibility. It is a terrific project, and I was very pleased to be standing in Avoca just at the start of last week celebrating the opening and the return of freight trains to the Maryborough to Ararat line. As part of this project this line has been reopened, bringing back freight trains for the first time on that line in nearly 20 years.

The member for Mildura wants to see the capitalisation on this investment. That is absolutely the aim of this project, and that is what the Andrews Labor government wants to see in terms of the economic development opportunities that come from this project. V/Line, as the project manager for this project as well as having responsibility for the line, is meeting next week, I understand — sorry; I should have said in coming weeks — with Ouyen Inc. regarding these issues. We will continue to work with Ouyen Inc. and other stakeholders, including the freight industry, in this local area so we can capitalise on the benefits that we know the Murray Basin rail freight project will deliver for communities like Ouyen, communities across the western part of Victoria.

Another nine members raised matters for various ministers for their attention, and they will be referred for their action and response.

The SPEAKER — The house now stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 5.37 p.m. until Tuesday,
20 February.**

