The Governor
The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor
The Honourable KEN LAY, AO, APM

The ministry

Premier ................................................................. The Hon. DM Andrews, MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for the Coordination of Education and Training: COVID-19. The Hon. JA Merlino, MP
Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Resources The Hon. J Symes, MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for the Coordination of Treasury and Finance: COVID-19. The Hon. TH Pallas, MP
Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Priority Precincts and Minister for the Coordination of Transport: COVID-19. The Hon. JM Allan, MP
Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19. The Hon. J Mikakos, MLC
Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support. The Hon. BA Carroll, MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and Minister for Solar Homes The Hon. L D’Ambrosio, MP
Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers The Hon. LA Donnellan, MP
Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality and Minister for Creative Industries The Hon. MP Foley, MP
Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety: COVID-19 The Hon. J Hennessy, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Ports and Freight The Hon. MM Horne, MP
Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Water and Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water and Planning: COVID-19. The Hon. LM Neville, MP
Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing and Minister for the Coordination of Jobs, Precincts and Regions: COVID-19. The Hon. MP Pakula, MP
Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, and Minister for Fishing and Boating. The Hon. JL Pulford, MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth The Hon. R Spence, MP
Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Higher Education The Hon. GA Tierney, MLC
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and Minister for Women The Hon. G Williams, MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing The Hon. RW Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary The Hon. RW Wynne, MP
Ms M Thomas, MP
OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Speaker
The Hon. CW BROOKS

Deputy Speaker
Ms JM EDWARDS

Acting Speakers
Ms Blandthorn, Mr J Bull, Mr Carbines, Mr Cheeseman, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Edbrooke, Mr Fregon, Ms Kilkenny, Mr McGuire, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman, Mr Taylor and Ms Ward

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier
The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier
The Hon. JA MERLINO

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. MA O’BRIEN

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party
The Hon. LG McLEISH

Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. PL WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Ms SM RYAN

Leader of the House
Ms JM ALLAN

Manager of Opposition Business
Mr KA WELLS

Heads of parliamentary departments
Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan
Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young
Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Mr P Lochert
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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

**Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee**
Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Connolly, Mr Eren, Mr Rowswell, Ms Ryan and Ms Theophanous.

**Environment and Planning Standing Committee**
Mr Cheeseman, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Mr Morris and Mr T Smith.

**Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee**
Ms Couzens, Mr Kealy, Ms Newbury, Mr Southwick, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

**Privileges Committee**
Ms Allan, Mr Guy, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Ms Neville, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan and Mr Wells.

**Standing Orders Committee**
The Speaker, Ms Allan, Ms Edwards, Ms Halfpenny, Ms McLeish, Ms Sheed, Mr Staikos, Ms Staley and Mr Walsh.

**Joint committees**

**Dispute Resolution Committee**
*Assembly*: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.
*Council*: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Mikakos, Ms Symes and Ms Wooldridge.

**Electoral Matters Committee**
*Assembly*: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Guy, Ms Hall and Dr Read.
*Council*: Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

**House Committee**
*Assembly*: The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell and Ms Staley.
*Council*: The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

**Integrity and Oversight Committee**
*Assembly*: Mr Halse, Mr McGhie, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor and Mr Wells.
*Council*: Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**
*Assembly*: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr D O’Brien, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Riordan and Ms Vallence.
*Council*: Mr Limbrick and Ms Stitt.

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**
*Assembly*: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Ms Kilkenny.
*Council*: Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur, Ms Patten and Ms Taylor.
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Thursday, 18 June 2020

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.32 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (09:33): We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

The SPEAKER (09:33): I wish to advise the house that notices of motion 23 to 26 and 37 to 41 will be removed from the notice paper unless the members wishing their notices to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2.00 pm today.

Petitions

Following petition presented to house by Clerk:

EPPING VIEWS PRIMARY SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria
The Petition of the parents and supporters of the Victorian Primary School, Epping Views Primary, points out to the House:

Epping Views Primary School, the fastest growing public school in the last decade, presently has enrolments at over 1,300 students, more than three times its intended capacity. Yet, there is presently no defined timeframe as to when an indoor gymnasium will be built, despite:

• Epping Views Primary School students being entitled to such a facility; and
• there being an overwhelming community need for such facilities within the Epping North area.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria remedy this situation by committing to fund the construction of an indoor gymnasium at Epping Views Primary School.

By Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (1193 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition be considered next day on motion of Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown).

Documents

INSPECTOR-GENERAL FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT


Ordered to be published.
Incorporated list as follows:

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT**—The Clerk tabled the following documents under Acts of Parliament:

- Auditor-General—Safety on Victoria’s Roads—Regional Road Barriers—Ordered to be published
- Game Management Authority—Report 2018–19 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*
- Victoria Police, Chief Commissioner—Report 2018–19 under s 139A of the *Confiscation Act 1997*
- Victorian Environmental Assessment Council—Assessment of Victoria’s Coastal Reserves.

**Motions**

**MEMBER CONDUCT**

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (09:36): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house requests the Auditor-General to investigate and report on the $2.3 million grant by the Andrews Labor government to the Migrant Workers Centre, whether any of those funds have been misappropriated for partisan political campaigning and whether staff at the Migrant Workers Centre were improperly directed to participate in campaigns at state and federal elections.

Leave refused.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, I am sorry, but there was a bit of noise around at the time. Can the house confirm that the government is blocking an allegation of corruption being referred to the Auditor-General?

The SPEAKER: Order! Leave was not granted. There is no point of order.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing, Minister for the Coordination of Jobs, Precincts and Regions: COVID-19) (09:36): I move:

(1) the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday, 4 August 2020, or an earlier day and hour to be fixed by the Speaker;

(2) if, in the opinion of the Speaker, the next scheduled sitting or a rescheduled sitting should not proceed on the basis of health advice, the Speaker will consult with the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business to delay the next meeting and set a future day and hour to meet; and

(3) the Speaker will notify members of any changes to the next sitting date.

Just briefly, to the motion, I would make the point that we have had now the best part of two sitting weeks in June, and the school holidays and the normal adjournment of the house over the winter period are approaching. The unusual part of the motion where there is an option for the Speaker, upon advice and after consultation, to delay the next meeting is a prudent step for the house to take in these circumstances given the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the transmission of the coronavirus. It would certainly be the government’s hope and expectation that clause 2 of this motion would not be required, but it is a prudent thing to have in the motion and in the resolution of the house given the dynamic nature of the circumstances before us. So it is in other respects an unremarkable motion, and I commend it to the house.

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (09:38): I move:

That all the words after ‘rising’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘adjourns until Tuesday, 30 June 2020’.

These are extraordinary times in Victoria. We have the COVID-19 pandemic, and the state remains in an ongoing state of emergency. One hundred and twenty-seven thousand of our fellow Victorians lost
their jobs in the last month. Victoria is now in recession—the only state in the country to be in recession—a recession that commenced, or an economic decline that commenced, before bushfires and before COVID-19. The government has failed to provide a strong economic plan to dig us out of this hole, to get our state back to work and to get this state back in business. The state’s budget is in deficit for the first time in many, many years. Debt is rising. Debt has been tripling now under this government, and the government wants to borrow an unprecedented $24.5 billion to paper over their own economic mismanagement. And we see this week a government that is imploding, a government that is at its core unable to function; a government so consumed by its own factional hatreds and political games it has completely lost sight of the fact that it is here to govern for Victorians. And now the government wants to shut down the Parliament until August.

We have already missed sitting days this year. We have already lost opportunities to hold this government accountable, and now the government wants to shut us down and go on holidays until August. Maybe they have got some more chicken shop rendezvous where they need to pick up wads of cash for Labor Party membership. Well, this is the time more than ever where this government needs to be in this Parliament. They need to be in this Parliament answering questions—being held accountable for what they have done and for what they have failed to do in this state. It is so important this Parliament resumes not next month or the month after, which is what the government is proposing.

This Parliament needs to come back in two weeks time. There is too much important business to transact. We do not have an Assistant Treasurer, we do not have a Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, we do not have a Minister for Local Government, we do not have a Minister for Small Business, we do not have a Minister for Veterans. We do not have a Minister for Suburban Development—not that the government seemed to know what that portfolio actually was anyway. It is not the time for a six-week sabbatical and it is not the time to go to the snow; it is the time to get back to work. It is the time to be accountable. It is the time to answer for what this government has done and what it has failed to do for Victorians.

This was already going to be one of the lightest sitting calendars in this century. The house was only ever proposed to sit for 46 days this year. We are now down to 43 days. Prior to 2018 the Legislative Assembly sat for an average of 50 sitting days in a non-election year. We are now down to 43. This government wants to avoid question times. It wants to avoid scrutiny. It believes it is not accountable to anybody, let alone the people of Victoria. This government needs to be accountable and it needs to be transparent. This government instead wants to shut down the Parliament and go off and undertake presumably more Labor Party factional work. They are all there checking their text messages, wondering what texts—and I see the minister put his phone down. They will be checking what conversations they have had online with Mr Somyurek. They will be checking what conversations they may have had with Mr Byrne, with Ms Kairouz and with Mr Scott. The great reckoning is coming. We have started to see that in the newspapers today.

This is not the time to go on holidays. This is the time when the state is in recession and when 127 000 Victorians lost their jobs last month. We need to get them back to work. And you know what? We should be working as well. I am not going on holidays, none of my team is going on holidays and the government should not be going on holidays either. We should be back here in two weeks time answering questions and debating legislation. We would like to see a plan being laid out for how this government is going to get this state back to work and back in business. I put forward our plan for how this state can do that. The government has got nothing. It has got absolutely nothing.

On 30 June a whole range of initiatives are going to be expiring and the government has announced no plans to replace them. This is a time for this Parliament to be here doing its job, working for Victorians. I support the amendment because we need to get this Parliament back to work and this state back to work.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (09:43): I rise in support of the motion moved by the Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade. I think all the huff and puff of the opposition is effectively being
misleading to the Victorian community. This is a normal sitting calendar of the Parliament of Victoria. It has been every year. And this ridiculous assertion that people want to go on holiday—the Victorian community, particularly the community that is tuned in to the good work of the Andrews government, recognises that when you are not here in Parliament you are still working on behalf of the community every single day. You are working in your ministerial office, in your parliamentary secretary capacity or in your electorate. Being in this building is not the only function of a member of Parliament or the government. In fact most of the work is outside.

It is interesting how the opposition have just discovered this incentive and this interest in being in this building. You never see that interest when it comes to speaking on legislation. On the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020 I think we had three speakers on that side. For every other bill in the last 18 months of this Parliament the government and the crossbenchers have had to carry the debate on behalf of the Victorian community, not the opposition. And all of a sudden, because it suits their interests, ‘Oh, we want to be here’. Well, too late. If you wanted to be here, you could have contributed to legislation. That is exactly what your role is: to contribute to legislation. So it is a stunt.

It is an absolute stunt on behalf of the opposition to demand more parliamentary time. The Victorian community knows which part of the Parliament is on their side—the part of the Parliament that has invested in schools, the part of the Parliament that has invested in public transport and the creation of over half a million jobs in five years and all the other investments we have made. That is why this is a stunt, and it should be considered a stunt. The Parliament should vote down the amendment proposed by the opposition and support the minister’s motion.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:45): To the member for Oakleigh, the people of Victoria know who is corrupt and who is driving this state into recession, into depression and into a huge debt that will take generations to pay off. They know what is going on. They can see the underbelly and the corruption of this government and what is happening in this state. Do not think that the people of Victoria are silly. They can see what the Labor Party is doing to this state and how corrupt they are.

A member interjected.

Mr WALSH: They did, and we will be back and will have to fix up your mess and your debts. I am disappointed that the Leader of the House did not have the courage to come in to move this motion herself. She has sent the Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade in to do her dirty work. It is very, very disappointing that the Leader of the House did not have the courage to come in to move this motion herself, because we have missed a lot of sitting days. We have a crisis in this state that is unprecedented in our lifetime and in the lifetime of many people. You have actually got to go back to the First World War and the Spanish flu epidemic or the Great Depression of the 1930s to see the state in a similar situation to what it is in at the moment. We need this Parliament to sit.

The executive government of this state is accountable to the Parliament. They are not accountable to the Labor Party, they are not accountable to the branch stackers that think they run this state. The executive government of this state is accountable to the Parliament, and the Parliament should be sitting to actually hold them to account and to have questions answered.

Through the pandemic we have had the situation where the Premier has effectively had total power. He has even sidelined the cabinet process to have his gang of eight run this state. That is why it is so important that the Parliament sits and the Parliament holds the executive government to account. It is important from a question time point of view, it is important from a legislative point of view and it is important that there is actually a plan back. What is the plan back from the COVID crisis? We as an opposition and the people of Victoria have not seen a plan back. There have been a number of announcements, but there is no plan to get the 127 000 people who lost their jobs last month back to work.
There is an estimation that the unemployment rate by the end of this will be something like 400,000 people. There has to be a plan to get those people back into work. There has to be a plan to get the manufacturing sector working again in this state. There has to be a plan to get the tourism industry going again, particularly regional tourism in this state, and particularly in north-east Victoria and Gippsland which lost the summer because of bushfires and the smoke and have now lost the autumn and are losing the early winter because of the COVID crisis and the restrictions that are there. There is nothing coming from the government about a plan back. There has been a lot about how everything can be shut down; there has been very little about how everything can be opened up again.

We see the situation for regional Victorian businesses being told they still have to work from home if that is what they have been doing. There are effectively no COVID cases in regional Victoria. There have been very few COVID cases in regional Victoria throughout this pandemic, but regional Victorians are being inflicted with the lockdown rules that everyone else has. Regional Victorians do not go to work on overcrowded trains. We are lucky if the trains even run, let alone be overcrowded. We do not actually go up into high-rise buildings with hundreds of people in lifts every day, so why do we have the situation where regional Victoria is being held back from restarting and getting back to work because of the rules that are in place?

It is absolutely critical that we sit in this place to make sure we scrutinise the government—$24.5 billion worth of extra debt. We actually have not had a budget in this state. All we have had is a crisis motion back in May when we sat to give the Treasurer—and I notice the Treasurer has come back into the house—unprecedented power to drive this state into huge debt, a debt that will take generations to pay back. We do not know what that money is going to be spent on. The government is not accountable for what that is going to be spent on. Is it just going to be spent to fill the black holes of the cost overruns on the major projects in this state? Is it just going to be burnt away on bureaucracy rather than delivering something real for Victoria? That is why the Parliament needs to sit.

It is very interesting listening to this debate and listening to the opposition opposing this motion when it is very clear to me, and I suspect it is very clear to everyone on this side, that they actually do not know how to govern. That is the challenge that they have, and that is the challenge that they face. They do not know what good government looks like. They were a bad government for four years. The people of Victoria decided they were a bad government after only four years, and they have not seen fit to re-elect them since. This is a good government that is doing good work. What we see from those opposite is an image you would be familiar with, Speaker, as I am sure everybody else is, which is Abe Simpson from The Simpsons with his fist raised to the clouds raging at the sky, because that is all they are doing.

Ms McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I think the member on her feet has no understanding of what is actually before the house. What we are needing to debate at the minute is the resumption, not the break that you want to have—the six-week holiday. We want to come back and get to work, and it would be good if you drew the member back to what the subject of the debate is.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do ask the member for Eltham to come back to the motion and the amendment before the house.

Ms WARD: Thank you, Speaker. When the honourable member learns how to add up, she can actually come back and give me advice on how to conduct myself in this place. This government has to get down to work, as we have been doing throughout the whole period we have been in government since the election of 2014 and the election win again in 2018. We are here to govern and look after the people of Victoria, and that is exactly what we have done. For those opposite to pretend that this government has not worked hard throughout this pandemic is nothing short of a travesty. What we have in those opposite is relevance deprivation. They think that the only way they can create any noise is to be in this place. They do not understand the work that is important within our own electorates,
the work that we have to do in our electorates. They also do not understand the balance that is required
to look after this state. We do come into this place to govern, and we go home to our electorates to
also look after those people who needed us to be elected.

I have not gone into religious organisations to recruit and stack people into my party, unlike those
opposite. I am here for the good of my community, as are you, Speaker, and as is everybody on this
side of the house. The people of Victoria are very important to us. Governing for the people of Victoria
is important to us. That is exactly what the Premier has done, and that is exactly what members of this
government have done; we are looking after the people of Victoria. They are our priority. It is ensuring
that they have what they need that is our priority, and the Premier has absolutely done this. He has
worked continuously to make sure that the people of this state are well placed to respond to this
pandemic. And when you look at where this state is at, how well this state has managed, how well
people are starting to come back into the community, into the economy, it is because of the hard work
of the Premier, of his departments, of the ministers, of the chief health officer—of all of these good
people who have worked incredibly hard to keep people safe.

And for those opposite to disparage that hard work and to not have respect for that hard work is a
shame. It is a shame that they would try to politicise something that really matters to people. Their
safety does matter to them. These people opposite actually have no answers. They actually have
nothing to say for the people of Victoria. They are unable to represent the people of Victoria, and that
is why they are still in opposition—because they are an absolute disgrace. They are a rabble who have
not been able to connect anything or anyone in this state. They are valueless, they are shameless and
they are unfit to be in government, and that is why they are not in government and it is actually the
Labor Party that is in government.

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (09:56): We have put forward a very important amendment that says we
want to bring the Parliament back on 30 June. I would have thought that is pretty straightforward. We
have had some cancelled sitting days, so you make it up when you can. Now, we have had the members
for Oakleigh and Eltham stand up, and I guess they are both doing their very best audition to become
a minister. I guess that is what the point was. The point of the member for Eltham was to get up and
to try and make those points. I was amused by the member for Oakleigh, who said that what we are
doing is a stunt. We actually want to open up Parliament to the Victorian public. We want to increase
the number of sitting days. How can that possibly be a stunt? As the Leader of the Opposition said,
when the diary came out at the start of the year we had 46 sitting days, which is just one of the lowest
on record in a non-election year. So for the member for Oakleigh to say it is a stunt is a ridiculous
statement. I think you have blown your chance of becoming a minister.

The member for Eltham said they are going to look after the people of Victoria. That is what she said:
‘We’re going to look after the people of Victoria’. What she meant was looking after the multicultural
groups who are going to be forced to sign up to become members of the Labor Party and be part of
the branch-stacking—that is what she meant. I am not sure about the kombi van from the member for
Bentleigh. Are they seriously saying now that they are going to get a kombi van to go around all of
the electorates and start signing people up in chicken shop car parks? Is that what is going to happen
with the kombi van? I wonder if that is what the situation is.

We are opposing the adjournment of the house, as put forward by the acting Leader of the House. We
want to come back on Tuesday, 30 June. Today we have only sat for 19 days. Today is the 19th day
for six months—19 days. I would love to know around the world who sits fewer days than the
Victorian Parliament. If you look at the first six months—183 days—we have only sat for 19 days.
We said when we opposed the government business program that we want the ability, and that the role
of the opposition here is to scrutinise the executive government. We have had the situation where we
had the massive bushfires in East Gippsland and up in Benambra and around Ovens Murray. But the
situation is those people are still crying out for help and assistance. We have the right as an opposition
to be able to prosecute the case for those country towns.
Then we had COVID-19. Again, as the Leader of the Opposition said, they borrowed $24.5 billion. We know, Treasurer, that it is not all for COVID. You know, Treasurer, that it is not all for COVID. This is about covering up the shortfall on your election commitments. All of a sudden you are saying, ‘It’s all for COVID’. It is not. We know. There are cost overruns and blowouts in all the budgets on those infrastructure projects. We know that part of the $24.5 billion is to cover those cost blowouts. And it is shambolic—absolutely shambolic. That is why we need to be sitting those extra days to be able to scrutinise the government. And your West Gate Tunnel—I mean, wasn’t that supposed to be the number one project? It was supposed to be the jewel in the crown. They could not even get that right; it has come to a standstill. That is why we need these extra sitting days, to be able to come into Parliament to raise these issues.

Victoria is in recession. The $24.5 billion. How can cabinet function when they are rotten to the core—when you are rotten to the core, when you walk into cabinet and all of a sudden all you are doing now is focusing on branch numbers? The mistrust in cabinet—how can it actually function? It cannot function properly. I thought one of the key roles of a Labor MP was to hate Liberal Party MPs. I thought that was one of the key criteria.

Mr M O’Brien: A KPI.

Mr WELLS: A KPI! But now I am finding out that Labor MPs hate other Labor MPs more than they hate us. I find it just gobsmacking that that is the situation, and that is why we have moved this very important amendment.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (10:01): (By leave) I rise to support the amendment. I think these are very dark days, that we are living through a time that none of us have lived through before. We started the year in shocking drought. We started the year with terrible bushfires. Our communities have been plunged into the worst crisis they have ever experienced, and that has had an amazing impact on our communities. I come to Melbourne and I look at the streets of Melbourne and they are pretty empty. I thought it might have just been Shepparton. I thought it might just have been Nathalia and Numurkah and my communities, but our towns are really suffering and so clearly is Melbourne, but I can only speak for my community.

We have so many people out of work at the moment, and companies are coming to me talking about the loss of further jobs and what that will mean for some of these big companies. It is very distressing to hear what is going on out there. We also have a whole lot of people in our community, older people, people over 65 and 70, who are very afraid. They are afraid of the disease, they are afraid of the opening up, they are afraid of many of the changes that are coming, and they are afraid that they may have to stay locked up for a very long time. They are starting to feel like they are the forgotten people. They are the ones who will have to stay behind closed doors and have deliveries come to them, for how long?

Now, there are a lot of other people in the community who are desperate to keep going, and they need to get going. They need their businesses to open, they need to re-employ people. Everyone has that fear of JobKeeper and JobSeeker finishing in a few months time. What will that mean? They have been incredible buffers to the reality of this absolute crisis and pandemic that we are in at the moment.

For us to now leave this place and not come back until August, to stick to a timetable that was set in different times is to me a failure of all of us. I am not here to talk about the politics of it; I am talking about what our community would expect. They are all out there trying to cope, trying to live on what is a lot less money. We are so privileged that we are in this place, that we are fully employed and that we have the privilege of looking after our communities and our electorates.

I think we should be coming back. For those of us in the community who are in regional areas it is sometimes very hard to get the connectivity that you need with government. Coming into Parliament, seeing ministers around, being able to catch them in a corridor, have a cup of coffee, have a meeting, these are really important aspects of being a local member of Parliament. It is really I think compelling
that we should be sitting more during the course of this year, during a year like we have never, ever seen before and may never see again. Let us hope we never see it again.

I support the amendment for the very reason that I think we should be in this place. The community expects us to be in this place and to be not only seen to be working hard but to actually be working hard, because nobody else is taking holidays. We cannot go overseas, we cannot do the things that normal life would have led us to so in a time like this we need to be at work, so I support the amendment.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Racing has moved the sitting of the house motion. The Leader of the Opposition has moved an amendment to it to omit words and insert an alternative return date. The question is:

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

Therefore members supporting the Leader of the Opposition’s amendment should vote no.

House divided on question:

Ayes, 16

Carbines, Mr
Dimopoulos, Mr
Fowles, Mr
Halfpenny, Ms
Hall, Ms
Hamer, Mr
Horne, Ms
Kilkenny, Ms
Maas, Mr
Pakula, Mr
Pallas, Mr
Richards, Ms
Tak, Mr
Taylor, Mr
Theophanous, Ms
Ward, Ms

Noes, 12

Angus, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Bull, Mr T
Cupper, Ms
Northe, Mr
O’Brien, Mr M
Read, Dr
Riordan, Mr
Sheed, Ms
Smith, Mr R
Walsh, Mr
Wells, Mr

Question agreed to.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 16

Carbines, Mr
Dimopoulos, Mr
Fowles, Mr
Halfpenny, Ms
Hall, Ms
Hamer, Mr
Horne, Ms
Kilkenny, Ms
Maas, Mr
Pakula, Mr
Pallas, Mr
Richards, Ms
Tak, Mr
Taylor, Mr
Theophanous, Ms
Ward, Ms

Noes, 12

Angus, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Bull, Mr T
Cupper, Ms
Northe, Mr
O’Brien, Mr M
Read, Dr
Riordan, Mr
Sheed, Ms
Smith, Mr R
Walsh, Mr
Wells, Mr

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

KIM MCALINEY

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for the Coordination of Treasury and Finance: COVID-19) (10:13): I rise today to acknowledge to the house a highly respected councillor for Wyndham City Council, Kim McAliney.
She has been a champion for the Wyndham community. She has served on the Wyndham council for 11 years and during that time has been mayor for two terms and deputy mayor for another two terms. Kim has a passion for fairness and genuine compassion for the needs of local residents. She has held the portfolio for safer communities, and her strong advocacy has established effective working relationships with social justice stakeholders across Wyndham. While raising a family of her own, Kim has been a leader and an inspiration. She encourages young women to take the opportunity and make a difference through service to others. Kim continues to serve on many boards and foundations and as a bail justice is often called out to assist when most of us are asleep. I wish Kim all the best for her future, and I am sure she looks forward to spending more time with her family that now includes her beautiful grandson, Jenson.

PETER GIBBONS

Mr PALLAS: I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the passing of Peter Gibbons. Peter served on Wyndham council from 2012 to 2016 and was a tireless advocate for the community. Peter was a strong believer in service to others, and his contribution to Wyndham will be remembered fondly. My deepest sympathies to Peter’s wife, Robyn, his family and his brother John, also a councillor for Wyndham city.

COVID-19

Mr R SMITH (Warrandyte) (10:15): Today I proudly rise in this place to thank and congratulate the Warrandyte community on their efforts in helping to control the coronavirus in our part of the state, leaving Victoria and Australia in the very fortunate situation of such a low number of cases and deaths comparatively. Like many in this place, my office has been inundated with questions, queries and frustrations over the last two months. On 22 March the Premier blindsided the national cabinet and Victorians with his go-it-alone position to lock down Victoria via a Twitter post, which led to countless emails and calls asking, ‘Am I essential?’ or, ‘What is an essential service?’.

Following some clarification from national cabinet, frustrations and questions began flooding in as to why there were different restrictions in Victoria compared to the rest of Australia. And who could blame Victorians for being confused when, for example, the health department, which was already under enormous pressure, announced that, yes, it was safe to go in play golf only for the Premier to, by all appearances, direct Victoria’s chief health officer to say, ‘No, this is incorrect and playing golf isn’t safe’?

Remote learning is another issue where the Victorian government has caused much anxiety and grief, and in raising the matter can I place on record my sincere thanks to all schools and teachers who stepped up to this challenge. The Premier insisted again on his go-it-alone approach, with Victoria continuing to hold out on students returning to face-to-face teaching against the advice of Professor Brendan Murphy and his national cabinet colleagues. Indeed the chief health officer in Victoria was quoted as saying there are no health reasons why schools should be shut. The Premier has made some outrageous claims about running small businesses that are just simply not viable, and it is my wish that the Premier gets back on track and gets Victoria back in business.

MILL PARK ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (10:16): I rise to congratulate all the teachers and staff at schools across the Mill Park electorate for their wonderful work during the COVID-19 pandemic. During these very challenging times they all stepped up and ensured their students received the best possible learning opportunities while either homeschooling or being supervised at school for those who were not able to be homeschooled. Many parents have told me how much they better appreciate teachers after having had to supervise homeschooling for their children. Now that they have returned to school, it has been a seamless transition back. Even when one school had a confirmed infected case, the professionalism with which it was handled was a testament to the principal’s care and compassion for her students and
Lee Webb, OAM

Ms D’Ambrosio: I would also like to congratulate one of my constituents, Mr Lee Webb, on being awarded an Order of Australia Medal for his ongoing support to veterans and their families as a member of the Greensborough RSL. A true RSL man through and through, Mr Webb has been the president of the Greensborough RSL for the past 23 years and the senior vice-president of the RSL’s Victorian branch since 2017. He was inducted into the RSL Hall of Fame in 2005. Mr Webb has had a positive and meaningful impact on the lives of our ex-service men and women, helping to build and maintain a strong community which honours the sacrifices of our veterans. Every day he goes above and beyond in selflessly supporting them and their families all across the state.

Princes Highway East

Mr T Bull (Gippsland East) (10:18): This week I have sent out yet another letter to the Minister for Roads calling for a safety audit on the Princes Highway between Bairnsdale and Stratford following the barrier installation. It contains comments from freight companies, truck drivers, bus drivers, emergency services organisations and also transport organisations more generally all stating the road is not up to scratch and outlining concerns over the recent high accident rate. The road is uneven and dangerous, the barriers are too close to fast-moving traffic in the middle of the road and the shoulders are just too narrow. When community concerns were raised in this place by myself some time ago the previous minister referred to those making complaints as ‘banjo-playing dingbats’, and then by the current minister I was accused of running what was called a strange campaign. These freight companies, bus companies, emergency services workers and transport organisations are neither banjo-playing dingbats or strange. There has been a spate of accidents here, and the minister ought to fix this up.

Gippsland East Electorate Water Infrastructure

Mr T Bull: I also wish to raise concerns about the on-farm water infrastructure program that has run out of money. It has left 18 eligible applicants in my electorate in the lurch. We are still, I guess, seeing the impacts of drought from last year. This funding program needs to be restored and these applications honoured.

White Island, New Zealand, Eruption

Ms Spence (Yuroke—Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Youth, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10:19): Earlier this year I rose to express my condolences on the tragic loss of Craigieburn residents Paul and Krystal Browitt as a result of the White Island or Whakaari volcano eruption in New Zealand. The Browitt family—mum and dad, Marie and Paul, and daughters, Stephanie and Krystal—were cruising on the Ovation of the Seas to celebrate Krystal’s 21st birthday. Paul, Stephanie and Krystal had taken a tour to the island when the volcano erupted on 9 December 2019. Sadly, Krystal did not survive the eruption. Paul and Stephanie were transported to Auckland and Christchurch hospitals, respectively, before being repatriated to the Alfred Hospital, where Paul sadly passed away in January. Stephanie sustained burns to more than 70 per cent of her body. However, I am pleased to update the house that after six months in hospital, Stephanie has thankfully returned home. Stephanie is being supported by her mother, Marie, along with family and friends. In keeping with the generous spirit of our community, a GoFundMe page has been set up, raising more than $86,000 for the Browitt family. These funds have made a huge difference, assisting with the purchase of vitally important equipment. Stephanie shared much of her story on social media. Much of it has been heartbreaking and much has been inspirational, but all of it has been incredibly emotional. I wish Stephanie and Marie all the very best, and I look forward to hearing of Stephanie’s continuing success in regaining her independence.
FOUR-WHEELER MOTORBIKES

Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:21): I call this morning on the Minister for Agriculture in the other place to work actively with Australia’s importers of four-wheeler motorbikes. The federal government, through an ACCC report, has set about new regulations which will see the effective banning of four-wheeler motorbikes on farms in rural and regional Australia, and Victoria in particular. The problem with that is the dairy industry, which is one of the main contributors to dairy output in Victoria, based in south-west Victoria, is going to suffer enormously because of this change in regulation. Essentially, the four-wheeler motorbike has become the main equipment of choice in managing people’s farms and herds, and they are used right across rural Australia and rural Victoria in agriculture. These bikes are not nearly as dangerous as many other pursuits that occur on farms. For example, in the last 10 years more people have died on horses than have died on four-wheeler motorbikes. What this means is that farmers will incur increased costs in operating their farms and the recent introduction of underpasses right throughout Victoria to help make farms safer will not be able to be used by many of the other alternatives that the government is suggesting could be used. So it is important—it is vital—that the Victorian Minister for Agriculture takes a lead role in facilitating discussions between farmers and the Australian government.

SOUTH BARWON ELECTORATE TOURISM

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (10:22): I would just like to take this opportunity to encourage all Victorians to go and explore our fantastic regions. My electorate, South Barwon, of course is the gateway to the Great Ocean Road, a significant part of Victoria’s tourism economy. Our region not only has the Great Ocean Road, it has the Surf Coast, it has the Bellarine Peninsula and it has Victoria’s second largest city, in Geelong. I encourage all Victorians to take an opportunity now, post the COVID pandemic and the easing of some of the restrictions, to explore our regions and to contribute to our regional economies. The tourism and hospitality sector has faced its challenges over the last six months, and with restrictions on international travel now is an absolutely fabulous time to take up that opportunity to explore our regions, to contribute to our regional economies and to take your family on a well-earned break. The Surf Coast, the Great Ocean Road, the Bellarine Peninsula, the broader Geelong region and all of regional Victoria are fabulous places to visit. Please take the time to take your families and your friends to regional Victoria and help support our communities.

MALLEE TOUGH

Ms CUPPER (Mildura) (10:24): Welcome this week’s instalment of Mallee Tough, where I get to brag about the achievements of my awesome electorate, in this case our outstanding business community. I would like to start with a shout-out to Mildura Regional Development, our peak tourism and business body, for its catchy initiative: ‘Fork it local Friday’. Every week CEO Brett Millington and his team set out for lunch at one of our many highly esteemed cafes or restaurants to promote what is open and encourage other workplaces to do the same. Through the COVID crisis the adaptability of our local hospitality sector has been something to behold, with business models adapted literally overnight not only to survive, but in some cases thrive, with sophisticated home delivery platforms for everything from Saturday night dinners to Mother’s Day high teas.

In light of fresh tensions between Victoria and South Australia we are doing our bit to smooth things over with our Start Here tourism campaign, reaching out to our South Australian brothers and sisters to encourage them to start their holiday in Mildura, or outback Vic as we like to call it.

Mr Edbrooke: I love Mildura.

Ms CUPPER: Thanks! Not only is Mildura a great spot for a holiday, but we are also perfectly positioned as a pitstop for an angry South Australian mob to refuel and grab a bite to eat on its way to Melbourne. Thanks to Mildura Regional Development for another stunning tourism campaign, which will undoubtedly aid our COVID recovery. And to our South Australian neighbours: please know that
you are welcome in our region any day of the week. In return I promise to take one for the team and book a week in the Barossa, because I am generous like that.

HAWTHORN ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (10:25): In reflecting on the splendid contribution of all our Hawthorn schools during the current pandemic let me acknowledge the great work of school principals and staff, supportive parents and grandparents and the exuberant cooperation of students everywhere. This is a good time to correct misconceptions and misunderstandings about how we imagine, label, fantasise and divide schools and school systems. In Hawthorn we have government schools like Auburn High and Camberwell Primary and non-government schools, such as Siena and Scotch. It is misleading and unhelpful to apply labels like ‘private’ and ‘independent’.

All schools are subject to regulatory authorities like the Victorian Institute of Teaching and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. All schools receive money from the public purse as well as via private donations, levies and fees. All schools have varying degrees of independence when it comes to curriculum and co-curriculum offerings. Let us talk only about government and non-government schools and drop incorrect, misleading, emotive and posturing labels like private and independent.

Coming from a non-government school background, it has been a rich experience in these last 18 months to engage in and support the wonderful work of government schools. In Hawthorn, government and non-government schools work together and harmoniously for the common good.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:27): Today we have seen the crime statistics released, and there are no surprises that there has been a spike in crime. Crime is up 18 per cent since the Premier first came to power. That is 228 additional crimes committed each and every day under the Andrews Labor government. We are seeing drastic job losses as well during this period. In the last month 127 000 people have lost their jobs. Victoria is in recession.

It is little wonder that we are in such a situation when you have a government that are more focused on counting their own numbers and looking after their own jobs than on looking after the jobs of all Victorians. It is a slap in the face, certainly to all of my constituents in Caulfield, to many of those small businesses that have been struggling to even keep the doors open and to people putting food on their table when you see a situation where the Minister for Small Business was more focused on rorting taxpayers than looking after those small businesses and all Victorians.

It is a disgrace, and the government should hang its head in absolute shame. Each and every member of the Andrews Labor government should be absolutely ashamed of themselves at this point when people in Victoria have lost their jobs, businesses are not able to operate and there is a crime rate spiralling out of control. Youth crime is higher than it has ever been, and we have teenagers being stabbed on our streets. It is all happening here under the Andrews Labor government.

WILLIAM CALLAGHAN

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:29): I would like to begin by thanking for their amazing efforts our emergency services in finding after two freezing nights William Callaghan. He was lost on Mount Disappointment in near-freezing conditions for two nights. To the 500 Victoria Police members, Victoria State Emergency Service members, Ambulance Victoria members, CFA members and anyone else from the community who helped out, I just want to say on behalf of the state Labor government: thank you very much. It was an amazing outcome and thank you to all involved.

COMMUNITY SPORT

Mr EDBROOKE: People might have tuned in to the return to community sport forum with Paul Kennedy—PK—from the ABC, Frankston Dolphins CEO Adrian Lloyd and myself a few weeks ago.
That night I mentioned that the Labor government’s community sport sector COVID-19 survival package grants would be out pretty soon, and I am very pleased to announce that the following clubs have been successful. I would like to congratulate the minister on such a successful round of grants too.


TIMBER INDUSTRY

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) (10:30): What hope have forest workers got when the minister in charge, Jaclyn Symes, either does not tell the truth or is being fed absolute rubbish from her advisers? In a letter to my colleague, the member for Eildon, she claims that since January this year all forest protests have been attended to and resolved on the same day. I am sorry, but once again that is just not true. Gary Moran, a timber harvesting contractor working in the Powelltown area, has lost 26 days out of the 42 days he has been operating in the Smythes Creek Road coupe. Gary has had tree sits that took three days to dismantle, five machinery lock-ons that halted jobs for at least a day each and black wallabies running in and out of the coupe, forcing a shutdown of harvesting to protect the safety of protesters.

As Gary told me yesterday, the level of anxiety and stress is high. It takes the Game Management Authority all day or longer to get to the coupe from Bendigo. He says it is like the government have set this all up to fail. It is totally the opposite to what Minister Symes is saying. Gary also told me that for years he has loved going to work but now he hates it because he never knows what he is going to find. The tactics of intimidation and harassment are really stressing him out. Minister Symes says in her letter that:

… timber harvesting operations are dangerous and the coupes in which they occur are strictly controlled workplaces. Every worker deserves a safe workplace free from all forms of intimidation. My department takes the workplace safety of forestry workers very seriously and will not tolerate illegal and/or dangerous actions from protestors.

Minister, practise what you preach and do something.

DAVID MCKENZIE, OAM

Ms WARD (Eltham) (10:32): I rise to congratulate someone I love and respect—same as you, Acting Speaker Carbines—Mr David McKenzie, for being awarded an OAM in the recent Queen’s Birthday honours list. This award to David is well deserved. He is one of the kindest people I know. He has dedicated his life to our community, including community health, local and federal government, and his passions, social justice and education.

David has never stopped caring and working for our community. In his early life as a teacher David saw the challenges families faced. He knew that things could and should be better. He became a councillor at Diamond Valley Shire Council, becoming shire president from 1969 to 1971. In 1972’s historic win by Gough Whitlam, David was elected as the member for Diamond Valley. David’s commitment to social justice included his commitment to women’s equality. While I know this is reflective of the deep love and respect he has for his wonderful wife, Barbara, it is also reflective of his commitment to fairness and to see and act against discrimination. This included his bravery in 1973 when he introduced the Medical Practice Clarification Bill 1973. Although this private members bill was not successful after a conscience vote, it would have legalised abortion. David’s work was an important step in furthering this debate.
MEMBERS STATEMENTS

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David has a long interest in health, including 29 years as director of Banyule Community Health. He was a former board member of Family Planning Victoria and chair of the Diamond Valley Community Health Centre. David is also the person after whom my David McKenzie Award is named. This award acknowledges the achievements of children who have shown care for others and always look out for other kids, especially kids who are vulnerable. I am immensely lucky to have David as my friend and to be the beneficiary of his support and counsel. He has been a mentor to me. For this I am very grateful. Congratulations, David.

REFUGEE WEEK

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (10:33): It is Refugee Week 2020. Congratulations to all those marking the occasion in the Clarinda electorate and across the state. I look forward to celebrating the Year of Welcome. This year’s celebration is obviously going to be a little different given the COVID-19 pandemic. This year Refugee Week will be going online. The organiser, the Refugee Council of Australia, have done a fantastic job in creating extra resources to help you plan activities and celebrate the week. I encourage everyone to jump online and get involved.

We know how resilient this community is; however, we have seen that multiplied during the pandemic. During the crisis and the hardship associated many refugee community members and organisations have come forward to donate food and assistance. Thank you. So, again, there are a lot of great ideas on how to get involved in Refugee Week on the website: films, podcasts, poems, videos, songs and more. Also, if you have resources that you think others could see, please email them through. Let us make this year a year of harmony and togetherness, and let us celebrate the Year of Welcome.

GLEN HUNTLY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (10:34): I would like to commend the hard work of the Glen Huntly Primary community: the principal, the school council, the parents, the teachers, the staff and the students. They have worked so incredibly hard to convince me and the Minister for Education of their needs in their community and their school, and we have responded. I am very pleased we responded prior to the last election with a huge announcement of $5 million. In addition to that I was pleased that we topped up that announcement a few weeks ago with another $2.1 million, because there were greater needs than we first anticipated. That school community deserves enormous praise. It is a fantastic school, Glen Huntly Primary, and it will serve those thousands of residents around Glen Huntly for years to come.

LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Mr DIMOPOULOS: For more than 40 years of my life I have put up with the level crossings in my community, along with thousands of other residents. It was this month two years ago that this government removed level crossings at Koornang Road; Murrumbeena Road; Poath Road, Hughesdale; Grange Road; and Clayton Road. We are all the better for it. They were there for about 140 years, causing frustration to the entire community. It was on cold and wet nights—that we all assembled to see those level crossings removed, and we all cheered and applauded. I want to commend the Minister for Transport Infrastructure for an amazing job in removing the level crossings across Victoria and in my community.

WEST LALOR TENNIS CLUB

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:36): Congratulations to Andrew MacNeill and the West Lalor Tennis Club. Andrew recently received a Medal of the Order of Australia for his outstanding service to tennis as president of the West Lalor Tennis Club, as well as his contribution to accountancy. Andrew started at the West Lalor Tennis Club in 2013 on the committee there, and he became president in 2015. Over his relatively short time in the leadership position as president at the club the club has gone from strength to strength. Last year it won Tennis Victoria’s most outstanding tennis club of the year award for its volunteerism. Tennis Victoria has also awarded the club the most outstanding coach of the year award. We know that in the community it is a very well-regarded club, not just because of
the outstanding tennis that is played there and the coaching but also for what it gives back to the community. They have always been involved in This Girl Can and other programs to ensure that women and young girls who are not normally as active are participating. Congratulations to all.

NORTHCOTE ELECTORATE SMALL BUSINESSES

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:37): On a typical afternoon local businesses along High Street in my electorate are buzzing. They run through Westgarth Village, Ruckers Hill, Northcote, Thornbury and into Preston South. So too the retail precincts in Fairfield Village, those up at Miller and Gilbert streets and so many others dotted around our community, but the days have not been typical, and so many of these traders are still struggling to get back on their feet.

Last week I had the opportunity to speak with Benita Bunting, who is president of the Northcote Business Association and runs Brown and Bunting booksellers on High Street. We spoke about the diversity and uniqueness of our local traders in Northcote, the ethical and cultural depth they bring to our area and how in a lot of cases they are women sole trading with goods they are making with their own hands. This eclectic diversity is what makes our area so special, and yet it is also what makes these businesses vulnerable to the economic impacts we are facing. The $10 000 Business Support Fund grants have been helpful, and I am pleased that so many of my local businesses have accessed them. I have been on a mission to make sure that every business in my electorate that could access the fund has accessed the fund.

JobKeeper has been good, but it could have been much better, and I have spoken about that before. Perhaps the toughest nut to crack has been in the arrangement between many businesses and their landlords. These are always complex matters, and there is no quick fix for a landscape that has largely shifted from businesses owning their shopfronts to renting their shopfronts. Government has asked a lot of the community, and I am proud of the way my community has responded. (Time expired)

SOLIDARITY IN SURF

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:39): As a local response to the global Black Lives Matter movement, a paddle out into our glorious waters at Eagles Nest on Boon Wurrung birrarang-ga biik was held. Solidarity in Surf was standing in unity with black and Indigenous people and people of colour and calling also for an end to violence and deaths in custody. It was early. It was still. There was collection of boards outlining the Aboriginal flag and the letters ‘BLM’ on the sand. There was a smoking ceremony, spoken words and a minute’s silence. I want to acknowledge and thank Indigenous elders and leaders, including Steve Parker and Sonya Weston, all of those present and Rinchen Wilson, Jock Wilson and Aidan McLaren. Placed in the ocean by surfers and by people standing at the water’s edge were 435 numbered gum leaves representing George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery and our 432 who have died in custody since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, including Kumanjayi Walker, Ms Dhu and Tanya Day.

The week’s prior reconciliation theme ‘in this together’ resonated in the hearts of all those present. It is a profound reminder we have a long way to go to address the injustices and prejudice. ‘I cannot breathe’ were also the words of David Dungay, Jr, who died in Long Bay jail in 2015. It just has to stop. Unity and action bring change. I take the knee.

HON. NICHOLAS BRUCE REID

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Priority Precincts, Minister for the Coordination of Transport: COVID-19) (10:40): I rise to condole the passing of a former member of the Victorian and federal parliaments representing Bendigo, Mr Bruce Reid, who passed away on 24 May 2020. Bruce held one of the two seats of Bendigo Province for the Liberal Party in the Legislative Council from 1976 to 1988 and then successfully held the seat of Bendigo in the federal Parliament from 1990 until his retirement in 1998. Bruce gave decades of public service to the Bendigo community through his long years of service in state and federal Parliament, and there are countless community groups, sporting clubs and businesses
that can speak of the support they received from Bruce. And that support for Bendigo continued outside his parliamentary career as he continued to work hard for our community. At a personal level out on the hustings I always found Bruce to be a respectful and engaging political conversationalist. My deepest sympathies to Bruce’s family and his loved ones at this sad time.

ASK AN MP PROGRAM

Ms ALLAN: On another matter, last Friday I was delighted to join with students from Eaglehawk North Primary School online as part of the Ask an MP program being run by the Victorian Parliament. My great credit to the Victorian Parliament for running this program. The students’ questions were thoughtful and demonstrated the great public education these students are receiving from the teachers and staff at Eaglehawk North Primary School under the leadership of principal Craig Barnett. It is a great initiative that is borne from these difficult and challenging times, and I hope it can continue.

MOUNT WAVERLEY ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (10:42): I would just like to talk today about my schools. I often go on about the schools in the Mount Waverley district; we have many and various and they are excellent. As I have mentioned before in this house, the work that has been done during the coronavirus of reinventing education and getting it back again has been astounding. I recently called all of my principals to say that I would like to sponsor morning teas for their staff to basically say thanks. The schools have been fantastic. We know that. The staff, the admin, the parents—all of them. I was delighted that all of my schools have taken up the offer. Some morning teas are still happening; I think Michael Cole down at Glenallen School is having their morning tea today as we speak, for which Muddings Bakery have provided the goodies. I will be paying them on Friday, do not worry, I will sort it out. (Time expired)

Bills

SAFE PATIENT CARE (NURSE TO PATIENT AND MIDWIFE TO PATIENT RATIOS) AMENDMENT BILL 2020

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr FOLEY:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms HALL (Footscray) (10:44): I am very pleased to continue my contribution to this important bill. As I was saying yesterday, everyone benefits from higher staffing numbers. Evidence has shown that higher staffing numbers lead to a more engaged workforce, better patient care and better outcomes.

At the 2018 election we made more commitments to protect and strengthen staffing ratios in two stages. The first stage was passed in March last year and was the first time that nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios had been meaningfully reviewed since their inception in 2000. This first phase of amendments removed the outdated rounding methodology on most shifts which could require nurses and midwives to carry out a workload that could be as much as 50 per cent higher than the ratio set out in the act. Although it seems obvious to say, that is a significant difference. However, without meaningful investment, these legislative amendments are not well supported. I am proud that we have provided funding to deliver 600 additional nurses and midwives employed in public hospitals across Victoria and we have invested $50 million to create a Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund that is already attracting massive numbers of applications across the state.

The fund has created training opportunities and scholarships for nurses and midwives so that that they can undertake additional training, increasing and expanding their knowledge base so that they can further specialise in their professions. It is expanding the existing registered nurse and midwife graduate program and has established a statewide enrolled nurse and midwife graduate program. Four hundred enrolled nurses and midwives will be employed over the next four years, with 100 positions
available to TAFE graduates. I know my colleagues have spoken at length about free TAFE throughout this debate and at other times. That is because it is an amazing achievement that we should be celebrating. The diploma of nursing is one of the most popular priority TAFE courses being offered through the Andrews Labor government’s free TAFE initiative, and I think it really represents what the Andrews Labor government does. We are investing in essential services and jobs that benefit all Victorians from all walks of life.

The fund will include $10 million dedicated to rural and regional applicants so that people can study a diploma of nursing at their local TAFE and then work at their local rural and regional hospital. This is what it takes to build an Education State and that is what it takes to give Victorians the first-class healthcare services that they deserve no matter what part of Victoria they live in.

Of course I am particularly proud of some of the investments that are happening locally in my electorate of Footscray in health. There is a $9 million investment in the Tweddle hospital. Tweddle is a really special place in Footscray. It celebrates its centenary next year—100 years of serving the people of the western suburbs, in particular new parents; it is a specialist parenting hospital. I am very proud that the government is investing this money so that Tweddle can continue to serve our community for the next 100 years.

I am very pleased that the former Minister for Health, the Attorney-General, is in the chamber because it was a very exciting day for me when she called me to tell me that the Andrews Labor government would build a new $1.5 billion hospital in Footscray. It is something that we are all very excited about. The tender process is underway and we are not wasting a day. It is the largest capital investment in a hospital in Victoria’s history, and it is something that the people of Footscray, our hardworking nurses and doctors and all of the people at Western Health are very excited about. We are very proud of the work that they do at Western Health.

Just continuing on about Tweddle and some of the work that they do for new parents, it has been a real honour for me to work with Tweddle on the redevelopment. I know that all of the specialist nurses there are very excited about the future.

This bill also provides benefits to an area close to my heart right now—child and maternal health. One of the things that Tweddle is well known as is a sleep school; I could do with a bit more sleep myself right now. Tweddle is very well regarded in the western suburbs for that work. I know my colleague the Minister for Corrections has said that his parents went to Tweddle when he was a baby.

We are introducing amendments to protect the high quality of our maternal and child health services by prescribing their qualifications into legislation. We are the only state in the country that requires maternal and child health nurses to have three qualifications: to be a registered nurse, to be a registered midwife and to have a postgraduate qualification in maternal and child health nursing. This is because the work they do is so specialised. It is very complex and very important, and their qualifications should reflect that. I am very pleased to support this bill, and wish it a speedy passage.

Ms HENNESSY (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety: COVID-19) (10:51): I am really delighted to stand to make a contribution on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. As the then health minister I had the great privilege of being involved in the development of the first legislative reforms around nurse-to-patient ratios after the 2014 election.

I think it is always really important to reflect upon the incredible history of nurse-to-patient ratios in our state. Nurses and midwives, particularly those that have been active in organisations such as the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, for a long time used to argue for nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios—not as part of good clinical policy, not as part of good clinical care, not as part of patient safety but in fact as part of their industrial and their employment arrangements.
The reason that was fundamentally unfair is that that was a condition that was traded in respect of wage rises and other forms of conditions that nurses and midwives would receive. If you think about the incredible expectation and burden that so many in our caring communities already endure, to ask those professions to give up money that they should lawfully be paid and wage increases that they should lawfully be entitled to to make the experience for their patients better, to improve clinical outcomes and to be able to bring the compassion, the decency and the dignity above and beyond the clinical needs of patients was a bit of an unfair ask.

But for many years our nurses and midwives did so. Legitimately nurses and midwives then decided that it was actually not a good thing to leave that level of patient safety and patient care to the hands of an industrial relations bargaining table, that it was a matter of clinical safety and it ought be reflected in legislation so that no-one could ever go and argue the toss about these issues in the future. That was the beginning of nurse-to-patient ratios making their way into legislation, but not until after decades of campaigning by nurses and midwives, who again as I said campaigned not only on behalf of themselves but I think more pertinently on behalf of patients. That has been the history of nurse-to-patient ratios in this state.

This bill is a next wave of important reform in respect of these issues. We know that better nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios lead to better outcomes. It provides an ability for nurses and midwives to provide better supervision to those they are working with. It provides an opportunity for nurses to have the time and the capacity to engage at a very human level with their patients, as well as bring all of their brilliant clinical skills to those experiences and those engagements.

This piece of legislation advances those ratios in a couple of core areas, and I would just like to briefly touch on those. It is addresses something that is called the ‘rounding methodology’, and of course whenever you have got a ratio and you hit 50 per cent you can round up and you can round down. This legislation addresses that issue by making sure that the rounding methodology across remaining shifts and sittings is consistent, and it will also provide a better staffing outcome in residential aged-care and rehab wards. Aged-care and rehab wards are very, very demanding settings. They are incredibly important in the subacute spectrum of nursing and clinical care. But making sure that people are given the right level of staffing support is a critical part of this legislation.

The next key area is what is called the ‘in-charge arrangements’. Whenever you have a nurse-to-patient ratio you can assume that that includes someone that has actually got the supervisory responsibilities. It is really important that in providing nurse-to-patient ratios we are not burdening someone with additional responsibilities, because it defeats the whole purpose of achieving nurse-to-patient ratios in the first place. So what this legislation does is it puts these arrangements in place in medical and surgical wards, birthing suites, postnatal wards, special care nurseries, geriatric evaluation management wards and larger emergency departments with short-stay observation units. It is very, very important to make sure that you have got enough resource in place in a healthcare setting in order to ensure that staff can be supported but staff also have the capacity to do their work.

One of the other important areas of reform that this legislation touches on is of course after-hours coordinators. After-hour coordinator in some settings is actually quite a complex role, and that is largely because, in terms of the history of rural and regional healthcare providers, in many regional and rural settings and locations you have had what once might have been an acute health service provider and it has changed its clinical offering and the complexity of its clinical offering, largely around population growth in rural and regional Victorian towns but also around the needs of local populations. An example might be Terang and Mortlake Health Service. It provides a lot of really important acute and subacute health care for many in the local community but also has a really important aged-care setting. So when you may not necessarily have the scale that you see in a lot of metropolitan health services but you do have the complexity, you are making sure that you have got the resourcing capacity for people, particularly after hours, to be able to support nurses in that setting. I think that is a really, really important change.
One of the other important changes contained in the legislation is the reclassification of Warrnambool Base Hospital. I know that this has been something that many have advocated for over a long period of time. But taking Warrnambool from a classification of 3 to a classification of 4 ultimately delivers increased staffing levels for that community. Warrnambool again is a terrific health service with a great and proud history. It is also co-located with a lot of medical research and training and education facilities, so being able to attract workforces and ensure that people who live in the south-west coastal areas who wish to remain in that location for the purposes of having their training and working can is such an incredible part of the local economy as much as the healthcare providers and the settings there. I really do congratulate those who have worked so hard in ensuring that Warrnambool Base Hospital gets reclassified.

There is another important change in this piece of legislation, and that is of course introducing amendments to protect the high quality of maternal and child health nurses in Victoria. We are so proud of the very high level of training and education that our MCH nurses have in this state. I was delighted to hear the member for Footscray reflect upon the services at Tweddle. Tweddle is such an incredibly important healthcare service provider.

Mr Andrews: QEV.

Ms HENNESSY: And QEV as well in Noble Park.

Mr Andrews: QEC, sorry.

Ms HENNESSY: QEC—the Queen Elizabeth Centre that the Premier has just reflected upon. Both of my children are graduates of the Tweddle sleep school: one as a wee baby who seemed to not go to sleep ever. I know my parenting and my family life have been significantly improved because of their support. The other attended as a toddler who used to do a runner from the cot at every opportunity in the form of a head dive in a sleeping bag, and after several concessions—

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Carbines): Order! The Attorney-General will have the call when debate resumes on the bill.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

MEMBER CONDUCT

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:01): My question is to the Premier. Premier, yesterday the Legislative Council voted to refer allegations of corrupt conduct to the Victorian Ombudsman for investigation and report. The last time the Legislative Council did this, you spent $1 million of taxpayers money trying to shut down the investigation into the red shirts rorts, including going all the way to the High Court. Premier, will you now accept the right of the Ombudsman to investigate these serious matters, or will you yet again seek to use public money to gag the Ombudsman from doing her job?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:02): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and again I would not necessarily accept many of the contentions in his question. But what I will be clear about is that Victoria Police, IBAC and the Ombudsman and any other bodies who seek to look into these very serious matters should be fully supported and should be fully cooperated with.

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:02): If the Premier is more interested in cleaning up corruption instead of covering it up, will he agree to members of his government, including from this place, being released from any claim of exclusive cognisance that would prevent them from cooperating with the Ombudsman?
Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:02): Again, as I have indicated on numerous occasions, including during this week, all Victorians, regardless of any office they hold, should fully cooperate with all investigations.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: COVID-19

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:03): I am pleased to rise to update the house on how our world-class health system has stepped up to respond to the global pandemic, the coronavirus, as it is impacting all of us right across Victoria and indeed across the world. We now have 1780 confirmed cases—that is an increase of 18 cases since yesterday. This includes six detected in hotel quarantine, one linked to a known outbreak, eight detected through routine testing and three that are under further investigation by our outstanding public health team. I thank them for the work that they are doing—them among many across our health system.

A further 12,400 tests have been processed since yesterday, meaning over 620,000 tests have now been performed this calendar year. That is a mighty effort. We are doing more testing than any other jurisdiction in the country, and we have one of the highest per capita testing rates anywhere in the world. That is serving us well to give us a scientific appreciation—not just guesswork but giving us real data and a really clear picture of how this virus is presenting right across the Victorian community. There are four patients in hospital—one less than yesterday—but two of those patients remain in intensive care. We wish them, their families and their loved ones all the very best, and we thank those who are caring for them.

I want to make it clear as well that our health system has stepped up with funding for an extra 4000 full-time nursing and 2600 full-time doctor positions created since we came to office. We have already delivered on each and every one of our election commitments to properly fund and properly resource our health system because that is how you deliver proper and the best care for patients, no matter what they present for. We are always about delivering on those commitments and making sure that our dedicated staff have the funding and support that they need. This year’s budget alone delivered $2.5 billion in a boost to hospital budgets. That is money well spent. It is not an expense; it is a profound investment in the best clinicians and the best care in the best health system in our nation.

MEMBER CONDUCT

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:05): My question is again to the Premier. Former multicultural affairs minister, the member for Preston, handed $2.3 million to the Migrant Workers Centre in November 2017, saying that:

This new Centre will better protect and support migrant workers … who are more vulnerable to exploitation at work.

Premier, a whistleblower at the Migrant Workers Centre has complained that staff were told to ‘organise booth kits, doorknock to solicit petition signatures and distribute political pamphlets’ for the 2018 state election campaign. Premier, why did you allow resources meant to protect vulnerable migrant workers to be diverted for your own grubby political gain?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:05): I would refer the honourable Leader of the Opposition to the statement issued by the Migrant Workers Centre today, and what is more, as respectfully as I can I would make the point to the Leader of the Opposition that I will not be lectured on supporting migrant workers. I will not be lectured on, for instance, delivering wage theft legislation, which you voted against.

Members interjecting.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. This is about why taxpayers money was used to fund a centre to send workers out to campaign for this Premier. He needs to answer for it.
The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Premier has completed his answer.

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:06): Premier, these further Migrant Workers Centre revelations come on top of almost $1 million of grants made by the former multicultural affairs minister, Robin Scott, to organisations run by Labor staffers linked to industrial-scale branch-stacking. Given mounting evidence of political corruption by so many Labor staffers and MPs, will you now ask the Auditor-General to undertake an independent audit of how these grants have actually been spent? Not the process of awarding them, but how the grants have actually been spent.

The SPEAKER: Just before calling the Premier, I remind members also to refer to members of the house by their correct titles.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:07): The Leader of the Opposition surely must know that the Auditor-General is free under the most expansive powers ever given to an Auditor-General—by this government—to investigate any and all matters as he sees fit. That is a matter of fact.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, what is also a matter of fact is that this morning the government denied leave for me to move a motion to request the Auditor-General to investigate these matters.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my right!

Mr M O’Brien: So the question is: why is this Premier more interested in covering up corruption instead of cleaning it out?

The SPEAKER: Order! That was not a point of order.

Mr Wells: On the point of order, Speaker, under sessional order 11 on the issue of relevance, I would ask you to bring the Premier back. The question that was asked of him was about the Auditor-General auditing those grants—those multicultural grants—that are a result of corrupt activity. It is those grants, not just a general audit per se.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is being relevant to the question that was asked.

Mr ANDREWS: As I indicated, the Auditor-General under the broadest, the most significant powers that any holder of that important office has ever enjoyed, as a result of us as a government delivering on each and every one of the election commitments that we made in relation to the Auditor-General, has the power, the ability, and I have no doubt the will to look at any and all matters that he believes are appropriate. The Leader of the Opposition is simply confused on these matters. Go and read the Auditor-General’s act. He has got more powers than ever before because of this government, and I have never doubted his resolve to use them.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for the Coordination of Education and Training: COVID-19) (11:09): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is delivering on its promises through its record $7.2 billion investment in school infrastructure right across our state. This record funding is delivering more than 1460 upgrades and 100 new schools by 2026, supporting over 7500 construction jobs for Victorians.

This is the biggest school building program in the history of our state. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 our work in building the Education State across Victoria continues without interruption. We have seen today the wonderful plans for the Gasworks senior secondary school in the Minister for Planning’s electorate—one of 100 new schools this government has promised and is delivering—and that will be the senior campus for students at Collingwood College and Fitzroy High. It is a great project.
We have appointed nine of the 12 principals for our schools opening next year. We are delivering on our promises in Ivanhoe—$3.8 million to upgrade Viewbank Primary School. In Melton we are delivering Staughton College $5.85 million to deliver an extension of the school’s gym and refurbishment of classrooms. We are finishing what we started in Warracknabeal. It was neglected by the previous government but has $19.8 million from this government to rebuild the primary, secondary and special schools. At Miners Rest Primary School, in the member for Ripon’s electorate, we promised to completely redevelop and expand this school. That is exactly what we are doing with a construction tender going out next week—$21.5 million from this government, nothing from those opposite when they were in government.

These are just a few examples of hundreds of school upgrades happening right across Victoria right now. We will not cut and close schools like those opposite. We are delivering on our promise. We are building the Education State.

PAYROLL TAX

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:11): My question is to the Premier. While the Premier and his government are engulfed in a bin fire of corruption, 127,000 Victorians lost their jobs last April. How many more are going to lose their jobs in May when the figures come out in 20 minutes? The state is now in recession, and the very modest payroll tax concessions the government provided are set to expire in just 12 days time. Premier, when will you stop focusing on Labor Party internal brawling and announce what further payroll tax concessions will be put in place from 1 July to help struggling businesses get Victorians back to work?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:12): I do very much thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question because it provides me with an opportunity, in direct relevance to the question asked about payroll tax, to remind the member and all Victorians that we have not only made concessions in relation to payroll tax deferrals, so we have made announcements about deferrals—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Well, the Leader of the Opposition asked about payroll tax, and I am simply explaining that we gave payroll tax refunds, so their money is in their bank account rather than the government’s bank account. Thousands of businesses benefited out of that, and I have got to say the feedback from businesses across multiple sectors has been very, very positive. They are very supportive of that particular announcement. There has been a range of targeted support that has been provided to businesses large and small across all sectors but most noticeably those sectors that have been hardest hit by the restrictions that have been put in place.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the question was very clear: what further measures in relation to payroll tax concessions will be put in place from 1 July? If the Premier does not have any answer, if he thinks that businesses are just going to bounce back in 12 days time, he should stand here and say so. Because I can tell you businesses are dying out there, and this Premier has announced nothing for 12 days time. He needs to answer the question.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition knows that is not a point of order. The Premier is being relevant to the question that was asked.

Mr ANDREWS: As I was saying, the government has provided substantial payroll tax relief by way of deferrals—full refunds, not something that I think has ever happened before because we knew and understood that cash was so, so important to the survival of those businesses. We have announced many, many different responses and we will continue to make further announcements in support of businesses.

But I will make the point that to be lectured on support for business by someone who advocated a budget surplus—that is what he was advocating, a budget surplus, it would be the only surplus in the
world in direct contravention of advice from the secretary of the federal Treasury, in direct contravention of the governor of the Reserve Bank—

Members interjecting.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Euroa and the Leader of the House!

**Ms Staley:** On a point of order, Speaker, once again the Premier is both debating the question and attacking the opposition, neither of which is appropriate in question time, as you have repeatedly ruled. I would ask you to ask him to stop.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier did start to debate the question. I ask him to come back to answering the question.

**Mr ANDREWS:** I of course defer to your ruling, Speaker. I will simply again make the point and conclude by making the point that we have provided very strong support and we will continue to do so. We know and understand that many, many businesses are doing it tough. It is critical that we have a slow, steady, cautious move out of the restrictions that we have. We need to do that carefully, to do everything we can to avoid a second wave both on public health grounds but also to underpin confidence in economic recovery. There are many, many businesses doing it tough. That is why we have been such a strong supporter of JobKeeper and the new arrangements in relation to JobSeeker. That is why we at a national cabinet level—

Members interjecting.

**Mr ANDREWS:** The Leader of the Opposition might learn something. At a national cabinet level we are very supportive of a national plan for jobs, and that is not a plan or a forum that will include the Leader of the Opposition, he who thinks the best response to this unprecedented, once-in-a-century economic crisis is to run a surplus.

**Mr M O’BRIEN** (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:16): While your small business minister has been busy stacking branches and handing over cash in chicken shop car parks, thousands of Victorian small businesses are going to the wall. Because your government bungled the eligibility criteria for the Business Support Fund many small businesses were not even aware that they qualified and did not apply for a $10 000 grant before the fund was closed on 1 June. Premier, given that the internal factional warfare engulfing your government has failed small business, will you immediately commit to another round of the Business Support Fund to give these small businesses a chance to survive?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:17): The government will make further announcements when it is ready to do so. I am indebted to the minister for employment, who indicates to me that I think we have received something in the order of 80 000 or 90 000 applications—so much for a scheme that no-one knew about. So few people knew about the scheme that 80 000 or 90 000 businesses have applied for it—confused, wrong. What I am asked to do is to expand spending and run a surplus—

Members interjecting.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask members also to stop shouting across the chamber. It is very hard to hear people giving an answer.

**Mr M O’Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The government changed eligibility criteria. First of all it said you had to be in a small business, which was actually shut down by the directions of the chief health officer before you could apply. Then it changed its mind. There was mass confusion. A lot of businesses did not understand they were eligible to apply.

**The SPEAKER:** What is the point of order?

**Mr M O’Brien:** The question is: what is the Premier going to do to open a new round of these small business fund grants?
The SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Leader of the Opposition not to repeat the question as a point of order. The Premier to continue; he is being relevant to the question asked.

Mr ANDREWS: The Leader of the Opposition is putting it to me that no-one knew about these grants, and I am saying that 80 000 or 90 000 businesses have applied for them. We will support those businesses, and we will make further announcements in due course. Captain Confusion over here—we will not be getting any advice from you on how to do anything.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: ROYAL COMMISSION INTO VICTORIA’S MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality, Minister for Creative Industries) (11:18): Mental ill health, as we all know, is one of the greatest social challenges of our time, particularly so now in a COVID emergency environment. It costs the Victorian economy more than $1.4 billion each year, but the real cost is not measured in dollars. As we know, its most terrible cost is measured in lost lives, families broken and human potential forgone. More than 700 people take their own life, sadly, in Victoria each year—that is triple the number of our road toll—and suicide is the leading cause of death in young people each year. I want to particularly thank my friend the Minister for Education and all the Geelong region MPs for the important work they have done in recent weeks on that particular issue. It has been outstanding.

There could be no better time for a royal commission into Victoria’s mental health system than right now. That is why in 2018 we established the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. It has been somewhat set back by the COVID emergency. It has had to deal with its important work in a digital and online environment. It is now progressively emerging from that. It has put up an entire set of important witness statements and important round table outcomes and is scheduling a significant series of further community and public engagements over the coming weeks and months to make sure that it can now meet its extended timetable of reporting by 5 February.

In that context, the work that the royal commission is doing was very important before the COVID-19 emergency. Coming out of the COVID-19 emergency, it will be even more so. The nine interim recommendations from the royal commission will be fully implemented, as will its final recommendations.

COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY VOLUNTEERS

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (11:20): My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, in recent days, weeks and months I have been contacted by many CFA volunteers and support staff who are very concerned about upcoming changes within the government’s fire service reforms. They have in most part expressed their worry that the commitments and promises made by the government, particularly around consultation on the reforms, would not be upheld, and it now appears their greatest fears are being realised, with Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) seemingly taking control over the CFA, including many of its people and assets, from 1 July. Minister, can you guarantee there will be no reduction in CFA volunteer numbers in my electorate and that no CFA operational or non-operational staff will lose their job from 1 July as a result of these fire service reforms?

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water and Planning: COVID-19) (11:21): Thank you to the member for Morwell for his question. We have had an extraordinary number of people who have put their hand up to join the CFA since the bushfires. I have said this a number of times in this house—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister has got the call.
Ms NEVILLE: Our volunteers are committed absolutely to their communities, as are our career staff. There is no question in my mind. In my view volunteers will not leave. Volunteers believe so strongly in their communities. The changes that we are making—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I could not hear what the conversation was going on down the back between the Minister for Racing and the member for Euroa, but it is hard to hear the minister give an answer to an important question when people are shouting in the chamber. The minister has got the call.

Ms NEVILLE: I am aware that there are people who do not want this reform; I am aware of that. People are out there at the moment trying to cause a whole lot of fear and misinformation to volunteers and to the community, and I can say pretty much every allegation, every accusation that I have read and seen that is being made by various organisations is incorrect.

In fact there has been substantial engagement with volunteers. We have had 54 meetings held across regional Victoria, ranging from the north-west to the west to the north-east—all of those areas. Particular focus has gone into integrated brigades because that is where the biggest changes are going to be made. Every commitment we have made in relation to FRV and in relation to supporting the CFA to grow as a volunteer-only organisation we are meeting as part of this, and on 1 July we will have an opportunity to have a career-only service that will continue to support communities, and a volunteer-only organisation. It is my expectation that volunteers and career staff will continue to work as they do right now, and in fact it is guaranteed in the legislation. On 1 July the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 changes to guarantee that volunteers get called out in each FRV district, so I am very confident both in the commitment and dedication of our volunteers and in the reforms that we are making that we will have a stronger and better fire service that supports Victorians.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (11:24): Minister, subsequent to the horrible 2014 Morwell mine fire not only was a new district 27 CFA region created, but the role of commander, critical infrastructure and major incidents, was also ultimately established. This was in part to recognise the significant fire and other industry hazards that exist in my community, including the presence of open-cut mines and substantial pine plantations. My understanding is that under the new FRV CFA structure this important position of commander, critical infrastructure and major incidents in my community will be abolished as of 1 July 2020. Minister, can you confirm if this is correct or not?

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water and Planning: COVID-19) (11:25): Can I thank the member for Morwell for his question. We have guaranteed every single job; no-one is losing their job. There may be reclassifications of positions, but that is it. There are no changes to positions and there are no changes to the work. There is a lot of work going on specifically in relation to how we do that work in your community to make sure that we are enhancing the services, not reducing them. So, yes, I can guarantee those services and that work will continue and no-one is losing their job.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SOLAR HOMES PROGRAM

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (11:26): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to delivering the $1.3 billion Solar Homes program. We promised to help 700 000 Victorian households install solar panels, and that is exactly what we are doing. Through the program nearly 81 000 households now have solar panels on their roofs. These families are saving now an average of $890 on their bills each and every year. Victorians’ enthusiasm for solar is growing even greater, with applications for solar going very strong despite these very, very difficult times. May was our biggest month of 2020, with 4981 households applying, and June is looking like it will be even bigger still. This is an important lead indicator about the strength of the industry and Victoria’s confidence in our Solar Homes program. We are creating 5500 jobs over the life of the program, and we are leading the
country in home installations, second only to the Sunshine State. There is something very interesting when we think about that—the Sunshine State, we are giving them a run for their money, that is for sure.

From 1 July our renters stream is expanding to include interest-free loans for renters and landlords. And of course all Victorians are benefiting from this renewable energy, and renters are now going to be saving even more on their energy bills. Four hundred and sixty-five megawatts of new generation has come into the system thanks to our scheme. This government is absolutely clear about what we stand for: lower bills and lower emissions through renewable energy and jobs. The 81 000 solar systems that are generating power on rooftops right across the state are a testament to that very fact.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:28): My question is to the Premier. Under your leadership you have lost a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker for rorting their second residence allowance, a minister chauffeuring his dogs, a Deputy President for printing rorts, a chief whip for adverse royal commission findings, a minister for allegedly bullying staff, there was the red shirts scandal and now three ministers for branch-stacking. Premier, you once said that you take responsibility for everything that happens in your government. Will you now accept responsibility for creating this culture of corruption, rorting and dishonesty that is consuming your government?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:28): I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for asking me about everything that our government has achieved. I am delighted to inform the Leader of the Opposition that 36 level crossings are gone. The biggest investment in health infrastructure in the history of this state—delivered. Whether it be at Ballarat hospital, Footscray Hospital, Frankston Hospital—should I go on? Perhaps I will. We have had the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and every single recommendation will be delivered. We have had a royal commission into mental health, and every single recommendation will be delivered. Wage theft—commitment made, commitment honoured.

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, firstly, before I raise my point of order, can I ask for some fairness in this chamber? You have continually thrown people out on our side when—

Members interjecting.

Mr Walsh: When members on this side are constantly interjecting you have thrown them out. Can I draw your attention to the Leader of the House’s constant interjections all the time and ask you to actually have some fairness in how you run the house. And on the point of order, on the issue of relevance, could you please bring the Premier back to talking about the big rort that is going on in this state and actually get him to answer those questions as to why he is leading a government that is just corrupt and using the taxpayers money to rort this state?

The SPEAKER: Order! On the first point I think the last few people who have been booted out of this chamber have been from that side of the house last sitting week—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: On the issue of relevance, the Premier is responding to the question, which was a broad question.

Mr ANDREWS: As I was saying, Speaker, commitments about wage theft—made and delivered. Commitments about—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Initiatives opposed by those opposite.
Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, sessional order 11 means that the Premier needs to be factual and relevant. I am just wondering if you could bring him back to the question: is he leading the most corrupt government this state has ever seen?

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr ANDREWS: As I was saying, Speaker, I was asked about all that the government has achieved. Within the time allowed I cannot state the full list of all the things that the government has achieved, with the record support of the Victorian community, which we are grateful for, and we work very hard to repay the confidence that has been placed in us. Suburban roads—commitments made, and we are out there delivering the biggest boost to suburban roads in the state's history. Regional roads—commitments made, and we are out there delivering against those commitments as well.

The list goes on and on. Saving TAFE—not gutting TAFE, not the padlocks on the gates, not sacking staff and essentially sacking students, but making TAFE better than it has ever been. We said we would deliver free TAFE, and that is exactly what we have done. So whether it be in roads, rail, hospitals, schools, jobs, support for exports and investment—

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, under sessional order 11, again, relevance. The question was about a culture of corruption, rorting and dishonesty that was consuming his government. So I would ask you to bring the Premier back to answering that part of the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The question asked the Premier about accepting responsibility for the actions of his government. He is being relevant to the question.

Mr ANDREWS: As I was saying, Speaker, I am very grateful for the question. It was a beautifully structured question. I am very pleased within the time that is allowed to me to go through as many of our achievements as I possibly can. What I will say just in conclusion is whether it be in the CBD, the suburbs of Melbourne, regional centres, the smallest of country towns, schools, hospitals, roads, rail, jobs, fairness, decency, equity—that is what we promised and that is what we are delivering. I will simply say to the Leader of the Opposition, I would invite you to give me the chance to talk about all of our achievements all of the time.

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:33): The Premier's federal Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, once said, 'If you can't govern the party, you can't govern the state'. Premier, your government is mired in corruption and consumed by your own political power plays and factional hatreds. Why does the Premier put his own lust for power ahead of the interests of the people of Victoria?

The SPEAKER: I do not know that that question relates to government business. I might give you another go at it because I do not see how that relates to government business.

Mr M O'BRIEN: The Premier's federal Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, once said, 'If you can't govern the party, you can't govern the state'. This Premier's government is mired in corruption and consumed by political power plays and factional hatreds. Premier, haven't you demonstrated that you are unable to govern your own party and you are particularly unable to govern the state because you are so consumed by your own power plays?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrev—Premier) (11:35): It is all in the delivery, isn't it. It is all in the delivery. Good on his feet? No wonder he is not at the bar anymore. He is not real good on his feet. Let me be clear, I am asked about—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am happy to rule that the Premier should come back to answering the question.

Mr M O'Brien interjected.
The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has the call.

Mr ANDREWS: Thank you, Speaker. I was asked about the interests of Victorians, and the interests of Victorians in my judgement are best served by delivering on each of our commitments, building the infrastructure we need and improving the services that every family relies upon. They are not well served by this sort of nonsense. They are not well served by confusion. They are best served—

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, again it is sessional order 11. The question related to corruption and factional hatred, and I am wondering if you could bring the focus of the Premier back in relation to those issues rather than governing the state of Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Order! It was a long question, and it tailed off. It was a broad question to the Premier, who is being relevant to that question.

Mr ANDREWS: I was asked directly about the interests of Victorians. I think I would offer the fundamental contention that removing level crossings, investing in TAFE, investing in schools and hospitals, delivering on each and every one of the commitments that we made in 2014 and 2018—commitments that received the overwhelming support of the Victorian community, for which we are deeply grateful, delivering on all of those commitments and more—is what I judge to be not just in the interests of Victorians, but it is their fundamental right to require us to deliver on those things.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr ANDREWS: We have, we will, we will continue to, and that is deeply frustrating to the angry one opposite me. But we will keep delivering for all Victorians.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Priority Precincts, Minister for the Coordination of Transport: COVID-19) (11:37): I am very pleased to update the house this morning on how the Andrews Labor government is delivering on our Big Build program—how $70 billion is being invested in transport infrastructure right across the state, creating and supporting more than 15,000 Victorians in work, with 119 major road and rail projects that are underway.

Let me start with the Metro Tunnel. A year ahead of schedule, four tunnel-boring machines are ploughing away right now underneath the City of Melbourne, creating extra train capacity that will be able to create room for an additional half a million peak-hour passengers every week. The North East Link has got three mini TBMs. Three mini TBMs are about to start early works on Victoria’s biggest ever road project to build that missing link, slash travel times and take trucks off local roads.

Level crossings—36 level crossings are gone. Work is underway on another 17 level crossings. Next year more than 50 will be gone, more than a year early.

In regional Victoria we are upgrading regional passenger lines with our regional rail revival program, along with regional road upgrades as well.

A contract has been signed to duplicate the Cranbourne line from Dandenong, paving the way for 10-minute services. Planning on the Hurstbridge line for stage 2 of the Hurstbridge line’s duplication is almost complete for the extra trains. We are working of course with the commonwealth government on planning for the Melbourne airport rail link that will provide better services for passengers and allow increased and improved access for regional Victoria and the western suburbs.

The Mordialloc Freeway works are underway. We are upgrading suburban roads, and planning has started—and community engagement—on the Suburban Rail Loop.
Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, just to assist the minister, I wondered if she has forgotten to mention that she needs to fix the Murray Basin rail project as well.

The SPEAKER: Order! Not a point of order. The minister to continue—8 seconds.

Ms ALLAN: These are the projects that the Andrews Labor government promised Victorians to deliver, and we are delivering them in spades and supporting thousands of jobs along the way.

Mr Northe: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to an adjournment matter that I raised 79 days ago to the Minister for Ambulance Services in seeking a response on the status of the Morwell and Moe ambulance stations that were committed to be built and open for business last year, there is no news from the minister and it is 79 days since I asked that question. I ask if you could follow that up, please.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for Morwell for raising that, and I will follow that matter up.

Ms McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I wish to raise for your attention two questions on notice that remain unanswered, 02327 and 02328, both for the Minister for Roads, which were asked on 19 March and due on 17 April. They are now eight weeks overdue. She has form, so I would appreciate that follow-up.

The SPEAKER: Order! Without the commentary.

Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I wish for you to raise with the Minister for Education a particular constituency question that is well overdue. It is question 02312, and it was asking the Minister for Education when they will allocate funding to Seville Primary School. That was asked over 90 days ago. I would really appreciate if you could follow that up, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member. We will follow that matter up.

Constituency questions

EILDON ELECTORATE

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (11:41): (2681) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. There has been an explosion of deer across the state in recent years, and we have seen very little action from the Andrews Labor government to tackle the matter. The deadline for the deer management strategy release date has come and gone and is now embarrassingly overdue. There are now huge numbers of deer on Melbourne’s fringe. Recent sightings at Sugarloaf are alarming for residents of the Nillumbik shire as the deer are causing substantial damage to property and produce in the area. The sightings are of enormous numbers of deer that are there. It is really quite staggering. Residents of the Upper Yarra have been advised that there will be a deer cull at nearby Haining Farm. Will the minister placate angry and frustrated residents of the Nillumbik shire and arrange for a cull of deer at Sugarloaf?

MACEDON ELECTORATE

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (11:42): (2682) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, expressions of interest for the old Kyneton primary school site closed on 1 June. Can you now advise of the next steps in the process to repurpose and reinvigorate this important space? As you would know, the Kyneton community expressed a strong desire for their old primary school to remain in public hands, and I was proud when the Premier announced in May of 2018 that under Labor this would be the case. The old school site has served our community for the last 160 years, and we want to ensure that it will continue to serve our community well into the future. I know how important this project is to Kyneton, and I look forward to the minister’s response.

EUROA ELECTORATE

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (11:43): (2683) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport, and I would like to know whether the minister will convene as a matter of urgency a
working group including local government, MPs from across the political spectrum who are local to the north-east, stakeholders and action groups to urgently examine the failures of V/Line and this government on the north-east line. The May performance data for V/Line came out this week and showed that just 0.6 per cent of trains on the north-east line were running to their punctuality targets. There is almost a complete failure—almost a 100 per cent failure—of the service to meet its punctuality targets. The month before, for April, it was 1.1 per cent. I thought it must have actually been a printing error, but it was not. This is just absolutely mind blowing. It is a disgrace and it needs to be fixed.

MELTON ELECTORATE

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (11:44): (2684) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport. In December last year the government opened the brand-new Cobblebank train station, along with upgrades to Bacchus Marsh and other stations along the Ballarat line as part of the Andrews Labor government’s delivery of Ballarat line upgrades. During these much-needed upgrades commuters using the historic Melton station experienced a change of platform. This change has resulted in less facilities being available for commuters as the changed city-bound platform does not have the same facilities as the former city-bound platform. With many of my constituents contacting me to discuss the impact these changes have had for them, I have been strongly advocating for further upgrades at Melton station, the busiest station in my electorate. I am delighted that as part of the recent announcement by the Andrews Labor government to kickstart our economy with the building blitz, the historic Melton train station will receive some much-needed upgrades. Minister, what upgrades can Melton station commuters expect, and when will delivery of these projects be expected to begin?

MORNINGTON ELECTORATE

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (11:45): (2685) My constituency question is for the Minister for Fishing and Boating. It is on behalf of two constituents and the Mornington sailing club, and the minister’s department has also received representations on this subject from Australian Sailing.

While those engaged in sailing arguably are more exposed to fresh air than those engaged in almost any other sporting activity, there are some significant constraints from both practical and safety perspectives that prevent a full resumption of the sport under the current public health orders. Specifically, the 4 square metre per person and 1.5 metre-proximity social distancing rules cannot be met on smaller vessels because crews are required to work together to perform manoeuvres, provide ballast to counter the force of the wind et cetera. It is suggested that an appropriate solution would be to add the words ‘where practically possible while actively participating in the sport’.

Standing and sessional orders prevent me from asking for a specific action from the minister, so my question simply is: what actions has the minister taken to allow for a resumption of sailing activities when public health orders are amended from 22 June?

BASS ELECTORATE

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (11:46): (2686) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing regarding the coronavirus housing economic stimulus package. Minister, what is the latest information about how this housing stimulus package benefits my electorate of Bass? As the minister and I have discussed on many occasions, social housing is very important to my communities. This $500 million building works package will provide safe and secure housing for some of the most vulnerable Victorians while also boosting the local and state economies as we recover from the coronavirus pandemic together. I would appreciate information on the state government’s building works housing package and how it is supporting social housing investment and jobs in my electorate.

PRAHRAN ELECTORATE

Mr HIBBINS (Prahran) (11:46): (2687) My constituency question is to the Minister for Creative Industries, and I ask: will the minister establish a support fund for live music venues so live music
venues in the Prahran electorate can survive this pandemic? Live music venues—the clubs and pubs in the Prahran electorate around the Chapel Street area—are an essential part of our local area. Revolver, Chasers and the Windsor Castle Hotel are just some of the institutions and many venues in Prahran, and no doubt many members in this place have frequented those venues at some point or another. The vibrancy they bring, their own communities that they have themselves, are so important to local jobs and employment—the artists, the musicians, the DJs, the hospitality workers and those who work in the music industries. They were the first to close, and they will be the last to open to protect people’s health, but they still have massive outgoings. The reality is that if they do not get assistance from the state government, many will not reopen and will be gone for good, and with no venues there will be no live music. This would be a massive loss to our identity and punters.

BURWOOD ELECTORATE

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (11:47): (2688) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Education, and I ask: what is the latest information on the development of a new school entrance and access to the netball courts at Ashwood High? The funding for this project provides students with a new entrance to their school and connects the school’s netball courts, enhancing their usage for groups such as the Waverley District Netball Association, which I am sure is of great interest to my friend to my right here, the member for Mount Waverley. Importantly, it will make a massive difference to traffic flow in and around the site and take hundreds of vehicles off quiet residential streets.

Young people’s education and health are priorities of the Andrews Labor government, and we are leading the way in fostering their return to sports and to education. Important infrastructure like this improves local amenity and improves access to sport and recreation as well as improving educational outcomes, and I look forward to hearing from the minister as to how the Andrews Labor government is delivering for Burwood.

FERNTREE GULLY ELECTORATE

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (11:48): (2689) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. I recently visited Knox Headspace to thank them for all the work that they have been doing during the pandemic. We discussed a range of issues that they have been facing and one of those related to their program, the dialectical behaviour therapy program, or DBT, and it is an important program to deal with the issues of borderline personality disorder. Since 2014 approximately 20 per cent of all of Knox Headspace presentations have been from clients who have suffered from borderline personality disorders, and with a lack of adequate treatment the organisation has developed a specific youth program, one of only two programs in the entire state. So my question for the minister is: what state government funding is available to assist organisations such as Knox Headspace to continue delivering vital services such as DBT in Victoria?

MOUNT WAVERLEY ELECTORATE

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (11:49): (2690) My constituency question is for the Minister for Corrections. Yesterday in my members statement I said an Indigenous Victorian was twice as likely to end up incarcerated as a non-Indigenous Victorian, and after reflection I would like to correct the record on that. I fear the reality is worse than I stated.

The proportion of Indigenous incarceration is not double. Given that only 0.15 per cent of Victorians are incarcerated, the figures would suggest an Indigenous person’s chance of being incarcerated is significantly higher than the majority of our population. So I ask the minister: what steps are being taken by the Andrews Labor government to address the over-representation of Indigenous Victorians, and therefore my Indigenous constituents in Mount Waverley, in our justice system? I look forward to the minister’s response.
Debate resumed.

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (11:50): I am delighted to be on my feet this morning to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020 which addresses the policy of areas of public health and public wellbeing, particularly patient safety and the delivery of quality health care. It is an area that I am passionate about. As a former board director of the Ballarat Health Services and former chair of the Ballarat Health Services quality and safety committee, this really is such important legislation that will really help my community of Ballarat. I am also proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, which is committed to ensuring Victorians have access to high-quality and safe health care as well as respecting the work of our nurses and midwives. I thank the Minister for Health, the ministerial office and the department for the work that has gone into this bill and welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to this debate. I would like to add that the Minister for Health has done an outstanding job since being appointed to this portfolio, and I want to acknowledge the incredible amount of work she has done alongside the Premier and the chief health officer to protect Victorians during the coronavirus pandemic.

Nurses and midwives have campaigned for these important ratios, and we have just heard from the former health minister, the member for Altona and now the Attorney-General, about the work that went into developing this legislation in consultation with key stakeholders including our nurses and midwives. I wish to thank Lisa Fitzpatrick for her outstanding leadership of the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Victorian branch. I would also like to thank the branch council, organisers, delegates and members of that great union. Locally we have a fantastic ANMF organiser, Allan Townsend, who does an excellent job representing nurses and midwives in Ballarat, as well as many committed delegates including my friend Geoff James whose birthday it is today, so happy birthday to Geoff James.

Nurses and midwives are at the heart of our hospitals and health services, and I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the important work of the ANMF and their members, who have been on the front line caring for our community during this pandemic and putting themselves at risk to save lives. My sister-in-law Christine Coates is a nurse clinician who works at a hospital in the north-east of England. Chris recently contracted COVID-19 while working on the front line at her hospital in the UK. She was very, very unwell, but like many amazing nurses and midwives, as soon as she had recovered, Chris was back at work on the ward, caring for patients and saving lives. I am also very fortunate to have two other sisters-in-law who are nurses in Victoria. Larissa Hill works in Melbourne’s east and Melissa Dickinson works in Geelong, so thank you to those wonderful women for the work that they do.

This bill is another step to providing better and safer health care for Victorians and protecting the working conditions of Victoria’s nurses and midwives. I am so proud that there has never been a government in Victoria more committed to supporting our nurses and midwives than the Andrews Labor government. Before I entered this place in the 58th Parliament of Victoria the Andrews Labor government passed the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015. The act legislated minimum nurse and midwife staffing in public hospitals to protect minimum workload arrangements for our dedicated nurses and midwives. This was a significant achievement and reflects the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to uphold patient and workforce safety in our public health system.

The important changes we are seeking with this amendment bill will see more nurses and more midwives across the state in medical and surgical wards, in birthing suites, in postnatal wards, in
special care nurseries, in geriatric evaluation management, in short-stay units, in rehabilitation and in residential aged care. By guaranteeing the minimum number of qualified nurses or midwives on each shift through patient ratios, and by providing quality health care for every patient, lives will be saved. I am pleased that this amendment bill will create consistency for determining staff numbers on wards and shifts to lead to better outcomes for our nurses and midwives as well as for patients. For example, requiring an additional nurse or midwife in charge in multiple settings, predominantly on the night shift, will reduce clinical risk and better manage overnight workload. This is a positive outcome for all of those involved. Victoria’s 90 000 nurses and midwives are heroes not only during the COVID pandemic but every day of every week of every year. It is a noble and proud profession that deserves our utmost respect and appreciation.

The Andrews Labor government is making sure our nurses and midwives have the support they need to keep providing the care and comfort patients deserve. This legislation is so important as it will ensure safe and high-quality care in a range of clinical settings through improving minimum nursing and midwifery staffing ratios to reflect increasing patient complexity and changing models of care.

I wish to thank all the nurses and midwives who support our expectant mothers in the preparation for their birth and the care they provide for mums and bubs on their arrival in maternity wards across Victoria, particularly at Ballarat Health Services and St John of God Ballarat. More than 1400 babies are born each year at Ballarat Health Services, approximately nine per day. I gave birth to both our children at Ballarat Base Hospital and received excellent perinatal and postnatal care through the midwife clinic, on the maternity ward and through the domiciliary postnatal service. I was pleased to able to participate in the midwife program for both of my pregnancies with minimal contact with obstetricians, as my care was undertaken by and was the responsibility of experienced midwives. I wish to thank the many midwives who supported me during my pregnancies, particularly Tonia, for the excellent care provided in support of me.

Another reason I am pleased to support this amendment bill is that it will safeguard the high quality of maternal and child health services in Victoria through protecting minimum education requirements for our maternal and child health nurses. I wish to acknowledge and thank the many maternal and child health nurses across Ballarat in Bonshaw, in Lucas, in Wendouree and in Central Ballarat—all services operated by the City of Ballarat. Our maternal and child health nurses are registered nurses and registered midwives with additional tertiary qualifications in maternal and child health nursing in preparation for community-based work with families.

It is really interesting; I did some research on this. Ballarat has proudly had a maternal and child health program since 1923, with the aim to reduce infant mortality rates and assess the health of newborns. These very important maternal and child healthcare centres were established because babies were dying particularly in summertime. So why were babies dying in summertime? Because there was no refrigeration for milk. Whilst hygiene is less of an issue today, the need for maternal health centres continues, with a focus on babies’ development and wellbeing and support for new parents.

I certainly benefitted from the support I received from the maternal and child health centre, initially in Mair Street before the relocation of the centre to Girrabanya in Ballarat Central. I would like to especially thank Lyn Hedger, who was my wonderful maternal and child health nurse. Lyn was a long-serving nurse who provided support for Ballarat families and was a highly respected maternal health nurse. Lyn, who has now retired, provided expert advice to many parents in Ballarat, offering her insights and reassurances for anxious and worried new parents struggling with the challenges of a newborn. I cannot even estimate the number of babies weighed and measured by Lyn over her outstanding career. Lyn also closely monitored the mental health and wellbeing of our mums.

I would also like to acknowledge Libby Ford, who is another absolute champion of maternal and child health in Ballarat. She was always so great with advice and reassurance, which is certainly what new mums need. Thanks to maternal and child health nurses like Lyn and Libby for their great leadership and their support for generations of Ballarat mums.
And if the chamber would indulge me, I would like to wish the member for Euroa all the best for the arrival of her baby, as well as offer my best wishes to the member for Burwood and his wife, Jessica, for the upcoming arrival of their baby.

In closing, the Andrews Labor government has the track record of delivering for Victorians in health care, and this will continue well into the future. We will make sure that all Victorians have access to quality health services that are patient centred and safe. This bill will improve nursing and midwifery workforce numbers in our public hospitals and ensure our maternal and child health nurses are optimally trained to deliver the best child outcomes. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (12:00): The critical point about this is that this bill will deliver better patient care and better career options for nurses and midwives. This is incredibly important on a range of different levels from what happens to you in hospital to what happens to medical research. What we have been able to do is engage nurses more in that proposition as well, as we build a better career path for them. It is becoming increasingly part of the government strategy to have this engagement, because medical research is not just about trying to get vaccines for the coronavirus and working on that side of it; there are also a lot of different practical things that happen every day. That is the innovation that we look for. I do want to emphasise the point that nurses play a critical role in how that occurs.

Just on specifics with this bill, if you look at how ratios are important, the presence of adequate numbers of nursing staff reduces the risk of patients developing pressure ulcers, pneumonia, deep vein thrombosis, ulcers, upper gastrointestinal bleeds, sepsis and cardiac arrest. Adequate nurse staffing ratios also reduce patient length of stay and improve recovery. We recognise the commitment of hardworking nurses and midwives to support everyone, particularly in times of need, and that is why this matters.

I was reflecting on the contribution that the Attorney-General, the former Minister for Health, made in trying to get nurse-patient ratios in and the hard work that has been done over a long period of time. It is not that long ago that it was the Royal Australian Nursing Federation—it was a union with the first word being ‘royal’—and what happened was that the sense of duty of care that this profession had, dominated obviously by women, almost worked against them in getting a better reward for the effort and the quality of the service that they provided. I remember they had basically a no-strike rule. This was right until the 1980s. So this is part of a long history of trying to redress this imbalance, to recognise the significance of nurses and midwives, and particularly—as anybody who has been in hospital knows; it is self-evident when you are there—to make sure they actually do get the reward for their effort and for their value and for their input in so many different ways. That is why I am including the medical research proposition, because that is what we are looking at.

I know the member for Ballarat, who spoke before me here, was looking at in the future what we can do in regional areas as well. If you think about medical research, there was $116.5 million invested in the last budget. One of the key projects is Generation Victoria, or GenV, with the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute. That is looking at how we actually examine the health determinants of life and a much bigger analysis of what happens from the time you are born; what are your predispositions for a whole range of different illnesses or asthma or obesity—all these different things. This is world-leading research, and this will be of great benefit.

Then you see how we put that into practice; that becomes the next proposition. I have spoken at conferences with Research Australia and said that Australia is world leading in medical research, and thankfully the epicentre is right here in Victoria, and I am glad to hear the federal health minister, Greg Hunt, is looking at that as well. We are clearly on a unity ticket; we want to make this a legacy of the coronavirus.

I am arguing strongly to get a centre for disease control and prevention based here in Melbourne, and that can join up the critical institutions that we have. I was with the Premier and the Minister for Health
when we gave extra funding for examining a vaccine for the coronavirus to the Doherty Institute. Peter Doherty won a Nobel prize. Around him you have Professor Sharon Lewin as the director, one of our most brilliant minds and researchers. Then you have the Royal Melbourne Hospital, you have the University of Melbourne and you have the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in that fantastic brains trust community right there in the heart of Melbourne. And then you reach across to where we launched the first trials in the Southern Hemisphere looking at a vaccine for the coronavirus, and that was with the Alfred hospital and the Burnet Institute, so that is the Commercial Road hub there. That is fantastic. And then you go even further and you see the great southern hub, so that is Monash University with CSIRO right next door, and all the work they are doing. Then CSIRO obviously connects up to the centre in Geelong that is actually the only one in the Southern Hemisphere that examines what is happening in viruses from animals. That is the way the coronavirus has progressed—from animals to humans.

What we are trying to do is work with the Australian government to look at where we can land this as one of the legacies of this pandemic, to have this centre for disease control and prevention. I have also discussed with the University of Queensland, who are doing some outstanding work, how they can be a partner. They think it is an outstanding idea—that is what they have said—so there is real merit in how we can bring this together. I think it is now a time where confronting death clarifies, people have put ideology aside and we are actually looking at the unity tickets that we need to get done. I think this would be a wonderful proposition as the outcome of this catastrophic set of circumstances where we have had the worst pandemic in more than a century.

If you look at what is the next connector, you need the industries. So we have got CSL, one of our leading companies on the Australian stock exchange, and I am delighted that it is one of the powerhouses in our manufacturing engine room. In particular where that is located is very close to my heart in the state district of Broadmeadows, and it underscores that proposition that I have been arguing—that we need to look at how we bring back these manufacturing heartlands. That is for our national sovereignty, our security of supply chain, so it is in the national interest.

This is how these different issues connect. I want to just talk at that level on the bill. One of the other issues that also is of relevance is what are we going to do to fast-track clinical trials? I think this is of significance because the global market is worth about $106 billion, of which Australia attracts just $1.1 billion. Australia is well positioned to increase its international market share in clinical trials. What we are looking to do in the proposal—this is a proposal I am supporting—is that we look at how Australia can remove red tape that reduces its attractiveness as a destination. I am advocating that we streamline regulation to unlock this economic opportunity while ensuring the intellectual rigour is still there so that the trials are conducted with efficacy and the results then stand the test of time and deliver in the public interest.

I just thought it was worth connecting those issues together so that you actually can see why nurses and midwives matter from the time you go into the hospital for your treatment, to make sure that you get a faster recovery, that you actually are taken care of and that you can regain your health, get back to work and lead the productive life that you want. Then also, to underscore what I believe is the next phase that we are engaging in now, how do we harness the resources that we have and the insight that nurses have in a very practical, day-to-day way to increase innovation, to come up with new discoveries and to remember that that is really also a critical part. Yes, we have the blockbuster vaccines that we are all looking for to solve things, but in a really practical way in a day-to-day matter this is a significant role that nurses and midwives play, so I want to recommend the bill to the house for all of those who have taken part over a long of time, decades now, to deliver a better result for patients and for nurses.

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (12:10): I rise to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020, as do we all. This bill will ensure safe and high-quality care throughout our health system in Victoria in a range of clinical settings through improving minimum standards of nursing and midwifery staffing ratios. This is crucial in order for us to properly
consider and address the increasing patient complexity and changing models of care in our hospitals and maternal and child health facilities.

This bill also seeks to safeguard the already exceptional standard, I might add, of services in the maternal and child health area that our Victorians are provided and protect the minimum education requirements of those maternal and child health nurses. There are a number of maternal and child health centres in my district of Mount Waverley. We have the Kerrie Road, the Mount Waverley and the Pinewood maternal and child health centres, and they all do a fantastic job. I am sure everybody in the house would agree with me that all of our nurses, especially at this time for Victoria, have done an exemplary job in looking after all of us who have needed it. The local centre at Pinewood was actually the centre where two of my kids were assisted and our family was helped after they were born, so a special shout-out for the Pinewood crew.

I would like to thank the Minister for Health and her team for their significant and important work, and her work obviously in bringing this bill before the house. The government can already be proud of our work in ensuring access to high-quality and safe health care, and once again we see another piece of legislation that continues this very, very important work. I would just like to touch on a number of my colleagues’ contributions. The member for Wendouree pointed out to us all that the Ballarat maternal and child health service is turning 100 in 2023, so I hope they are going to have a party, and let us hope we are all around to see them there. That would be great.

In more local news to us in Mount Waverley, my colleague from Ringwood, as he stated yesterday, has recently been celebrating the birth of his and his wife’s first child, which I am sure we all celebrate. Little Teddy, he is a cracker. He has good hair like his dad, and the best thing is that I can only presume—I am sure he will correct me if I am wrong—that we have another Hawks fan in Victoria, and that is good for all of us. That is a very good thing. I have got to find a little teddy or a little jumper; we have got to get that done because you have to get that done. I must admit with my third child, Sammy, when I rang Hawthorn membership to say, ‘Hey, look, we need to move our seats’, I said, ‘By the way, I’ll need to add a membership next year because little Sammy is coming along’, and they said, ‘Don’t worry about that, we’ll do it now’, so Sammy was a member before he was even born.

Mr Donnellan: A little branch-stacking there.

Mr FREGON: Now, now. Thank you for the interjection, Minister. We will move on. Also, we have to send our best wishes to the member for Burwood and the member for Euroa. We have had a number of babies in the house. The member to my left there obviously recently became a dad as well.

A member interjected.

Mr FREGON: There is something in the water in Parliament, I think.

Two acts will be amended by this bill, being the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 and the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. In 2015 the Andrews government enshrined nurse- and midwife-to-patient staffing ratios into law. That was a very good day—an advancement that we are proud to have achieved. But it does not stop there. You do not just do something and say, ‘Oh well, that is done’ and walk away. We know that higher staffing numbers not only lead to a more engaged workforce but also to better patient care and outcomes. And isn’t that really the most important thing? It is about the people who need the services when they need them. So making sure that our nurses are fit and trained and relaxed and able to do their best is obviously better for the people who need them.

As we have seen throughout this coronavirus period in the state, they have done very well, so making it even that little bit better is good for us all. I was delighted, as a candidate in 2018, to be able to promise the people of Mount Waverley that should we be voted back in—as the people obviously did—we would strengthen those ratios, and here we are today. We have come full circle. I would not
speak for the minister obviously, but I am sure that the work continues, and I know that this government will continue to work on the safety of patients.

Now, I do need to make a slight apology to one nurse in particular, so I hope you can indulge me, Acting Speaker. Around about eight years ago my appendix burst, and it was a bit nasty. I will not go into details because you do not need to know, but at the end of the day I was in hospital for about 30 days. Can I specifically thank all of the staff and nurses at the Monash hospital and Jessie McPherson Private Hospital; they were fantastic. As I said, there is one nurse that I do need to apologise to. I do not know her name—I probably would not name her even if I did because that would be a bit cheeky—but suffice to say that towards the end of the 30 days I was not feeling great and this particular nurse, who was in charge of the area, was on at me quite regularly about getting up and walking around because I had to get moving again. I did not feel like doing that because I was not exactly well, but she was on and on at me; she was doing her job. Suffice to say I finally got up, a bit grumpy, walked around, got back to the area just near my room where she was and I said, ‘You happy now?’ and walked in. So I do apologise for being grumpy. I do. I should not have been that way. But I am pretty sure as I walked off—a grumpy, middle-aged bloke—into my room, she probably thought, ‘Yes, I am, thank you. Now nick off’. I do apologise.

While I am talking about Monash Health, I would like to extend your thoughts, Acting Speaker, to how not only our Minister for Health helps our patients but also Victoria’s Big Build and our level crossing removals help our patients. You might be thinking, ‘Well, that is a very long bow, how are you going to make this work?’. I will tell you. Early last year I had a meeting with the CEO of Monash hospital, and we were talking about many things because that is the local hospital for the people in Mount Waverley. I said to him, ‘Look, Clayton Road level crossing is gone’, which is fantastic, by the way, thank you, Minister for Transport Infrastructure. I said, ‘Is that a good thing? What do you think?’ And he looked at me and he said, ‘Well, put it this way. We do not deliver babies in ambulances anymore’.

Think about that. We have removed, I believe, 36 level crossings, but we have removed one particular one at Clayton Road near the Monash hospital and as a result mothers who are in the process of delivering their children do not risk having to have those children delivered in ambulances; they are making it to the hospital when they were not before. That is a real tangible benefit of some of the work that this government has done over the last five and a half years, and that work will continue.

I know that for the Minister for Health, the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the whole cabinet—the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers is in front of me and I know his work continues on a daily basis. That work is very important, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr J BULL (Sunbury) (12:21): I am very pleased this afternoon to have the opportunity to contribute to debate on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020.

It is fair to say that 2020 as a year thus far has had it all. We are not even halfway—not even at July—and already we have seen this year some of the most destructive and devastating bushfires that this state has ever seen and of course we have seen a global pandemic the likes of which none of us have ever lived through before and it is certainly still a long way from over. It has indeed been an incredibly challenging year for the people of Victoria, for the people of Australia and indeed for people right around the world.

In saying that, it has been a year I believe where we have seen a great deal of collective effort and a great deal of collective will in people banding together to work for their local communities, to support one another and to do the very best they can in incredibly challenging circumstances. If you are indeed to take the bushfires, which do feel a lot longer ago than they were, and look at the way that local communities rallied together and worked with emergency services to take on such a threat, it is something I think we should all be very proud of. In a very similar way, in a very similar fashion, the
way our healthcare workforce, the way nurses, doctors and the entire hospital and healthcare system have responded so rapidly in conjunction with relevant departments and governments, both our government and governments right across the country, has certainly been something that I think we should all be incredibly proud of. In saying that, Acting Speaker Carbines, as I am sure you will agree, this is of course a long way from over and we have to continually work, continually invest and continually be in contact with our health authorities, taking the advice of the chief health officer and making sure we are doing everything we possibly can to work together and bring down the threat of COVID-19.

When it comes to our healthcare system there are no more important people than our nursing workforce. Certainly from all of the contributions that I have listened to, hearing the stories of members and their families that have been in hospitals around the state and have needed the care and support of our nursing staff, I think there is no disagreement that our nurses do such a fantastic job in local communities, in the CBD, in rural and regional Victoria and right across the state. I want to take this opportunity this afternoon to once again thank all of the frontline workers for the extraordinary commitment, care, compassion and capability not just through COVID-19, which as I mentioned has been such a challenge, but for the work they do each and every day.

I certainly have enjoyed listening to contributions from other members on this bill. There is such a consistent theme around the feeling that members and their families and people in the community get when they actually walk into a healthcare service and they are given such quality care.

Speaking personally for our little one at home, when we have needed—and there have been times in just her first year of life—that attention to detail, that quality of care, that support that you are able to access in this state, it has been provided. I really just want to take the opportunity once again to thank all of the people in our health and hospital system for the incredible work that they do and the incredible work that they will continue to do. I also want to acknowledge the work of my sister and two aunts, who are nurses. The aunts have been nurses for a very long time and have done a terrific job. My cousin is also a nurse and other cousins, Mel and Ben, are paramedics. Thank you for the work that you do.

This is an important bill because it amends two acts: the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 and the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. The amendments in the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill include creating consistency in extending the rounding method across the board, requiring an additional nurse or midwife in charge in multiple settings, particularly on night shifts. This will act to reduce the clinical risk and better manage overnight work, which is of course critically important. The bill will also require a supernumerary after-hours coordinator in small hospitals with one or two wards to manage the increasing complexity in these settings and reclassify the Warrnambool Base Hospital, as others have mentioned, to better reflect and anticipate practice, hospital capability and patient complexity.

The amendments that have already been mentioned by other members to the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 include limiting an operator of a maternal and child health centre or statewide telephone advice service providing maternal and child health advice from employing or engaging a nurse to provide prescribed maternal and health nursing service unless the nurse has prescribed specialist qualifications, as well as providing the Governor in Council with the power to make regulations such as prescribing a service to be a maternal or child health nursing service, prescribing a qualification to be a specified maternal and child health nursing qualification and outlining the process or requirements to determine whether a qualification is substantially equivalent to prescribed maternal and child health nursing.

These changes are particularly important when it comes to the next phase of making sure that we are as a government, as I mentioned earlier, supporting the incredibly important work of nurses right across the state, whether it be right here where we are in the CBD, where I am in the outer suburbs or
in rural and regional Victoria. They are really, really important changes that are going to make a difference to the way nurses are able to act and operate.

This piece of legislation before the house this afternoon is really about the quality of care, it is about safety and it is about certainty. The bill will improve workload arrangements and have a significant and lasting impact on the provision of safe, empathetic and high-quality patient-centred care. As I have mentioned, there is certainly nothing more important than that, and I do believe in this state—in our great state—we have the best nurses in the world and the best system of health care and health services right across the state, and I think that is something that we are all very fortunate to have.

It is something, though, that this government considers fundamentally important when it comes to investment—not just investment as a once-off hit, not just a sugar hit every now and then but sustained, well-planned, well-thought-out investment over consecutive budgets, constantly working with the workforce, constantly working with planning agencies, making sure we are putting money into areas where we need it the most, making sure that every patient right across the state, no matter their condition and no matter the health that they are in, receives the best possible care when they walk into a healthcare facility. That is what this government is about. That is what this government has spent our time in office focusing on, certainly through the five and a bit years that we have been in office: making sure that each and every time we have got an opportunity for legislative reform, we have got an opportunity for investment via the budget and we have got an opportunity through general discussion, through consultation and through a willingness to reform that we are consistently, each and every time, working with the very best in science, the very best in capital and investment—the very best ideas—to make sure that we continue to run a high-quality world-class health system.

That is the focus of this government, and I am really proud. I have got a long list here of the many, many investments that we have made right across the state over a very long time. I am certainly, in the 22 seconds that I have got left, not going to be able to get through all of those, but I do want to once again express thanks for the incredible work that nurses do and that our healthcare professionals do right across the state each and every day to provide the very best care when people need it the most. I very proudly commend the bill to the house.

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Public Transport) (12:31): I am very pleased today to rise to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020—that is a mouthful. I congratulate the Minister for Health in the other place for bringing this really important piece of legislation into the Parliament, especially when she has done so much work over the past few months and has actually worked tirelessly in dealing with the pandemic.

This bill comes before the house at a time when I am sure every Victorian is acutely aware and appreciative of our highly skilled and dedicated nurses and midwives and in fact of all frontline staff who have been there for us through the coronavirus pandemic. It delivers on the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to all Victorians that they will have access to high-quality and safe health care, and it protects the high quality of our invaluable maternal and child health services. This bill realises this through improving nursing and midwifery workforce numbers in our public hospitals and ensuring our maternal and child health nurses are trained to deliver the very best child, maternal and family-centred practice.

Specifically it will amend the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 to establish and improve nurse and midwife-to-patient ratios in a range of public hospital settings. It will also amend the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 to safeguard the delivery of high-quality maternal and child health services in Victoria by ensuring that providers of these services employ only maternal and child health nurses with prescribed qualifications.

The amendments to the 2015 safe patient care act in the bill fulfil our 2018 election commitment, which was to protect and strengthen ratios in two stages. The groundbreaking 2015 act enshrined into
legislation nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios in public hospitals—ratios that had previously been confined to enterprise agreements. This is a really proud achievement of our government and one that we are deeply committed to, and I am very honoured to be a member of a government that continues to demonstrate its commitment to and legislate for protecting minimum workload arrangements for our dedicated nurses and midwives and upholding safety for both patients and our workforce in our public health system.

The bill before us today builds on the first phase of amendments to the safe patient care act as part of our ongoing commitment to improving it. The first phase of amendments passed by this Parliament in March 2019 removed the outdated rounding methodology on most shifts, meaning that in most circumstances nurses and midwives were no longer required to carry a workload that at the time could be 50 per cent greater than the ratios set out in the safe patient care act. It also established new ratios in key clinical settings. Our nurses tell us that ratios matter. Good ratios allow them to provide the quality care Victorians expect and deserve, and importantly they protect patient safety. There is little disagreement globally about the relationship between nurse staffing levels and patient outcomes in healthcare settings. We get it, and we are acting on it.

This bill will deliver on phase 2 of our election commitment and complete the removal of the rounding methodology across the remaining shifts and settings in acute stroke, haematology and oncology wards. The amendments will also increase staffing numbers by requiring an additional nurse or midwife in charge across a range of settings, particularly on night shift. It will apply to medical and surgical wards, birthing suites, postnatal wards, special care nurseries, geriatric evaluation management wards and larger emergency departments with short-stay observation units. This will allow nurses and midwives more time to directly care for patients and reduce clinical risk.

The government recognises the ever-increasing complexity associated with the coordination of mixed services in small rural hospitals. The bill amends the act to require an additional after-hours coordinator to help manage this complexity. It will apply specifically to level 4 hospitals that operate a birthing suite and/or an emergency apartment with greater than 2500 presentations per annum, such as Kyneton District Health Service, Terang and Mortlake Health Service, Colac Area Health service and South Gippsland Hospital in Foster.

This second phase will see a further 500 nurses and midwives employed in our public health system, from our busiest metropolitan hospitals to our rural services. This, in addition to the 600 positions funded under phase 1, takes the total to 1100 extra nurses and midwives. We have got on with the job of making sure that we are building an appropriately skilled workforce.

We have also got on with the job of making sure we have the skilled workforce to fill these positions. We have invested $50 million to create a Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund, that is already attracting record numbers of applications across the state. This fund is creating training opportunities, including scholarships for nurses and midwives to further specialise so they can fill new positions that will be created. It is expanding the existing registered nurse and midwife graduate program and for the first time establishing a statewide enrolled nurse graduate program. This will employ 400 enrolled nurses over the next four years, with 100 of these positions available to TAFE graduates.

The diploma of nursing is one of the most popular priority TAFE courses being offered as part of our government’s free TAFE initiative. It means more Victorians will be able to study a diploma of nursing for free at TAFE and then start working as an enrolled nurse as soon as they graduate. The fund will also provide up to 400 postgraduate scholarships for current nurses and midwives to upgrade their skills, 400 places in programs such as the postgraduate midwifery employment program as well as a refresher program for 800 nurses and midwives currently registered but not practising so they can re-enter the workforce. It will also include $10 million dedicated to rural and regional applicants so that people can study a diploma of nursing at their local TAFE and then work in their local rural or regional hospital. Only Labor invests in high-quality and safe healthcare systems.
In regard to the reclassification of the Warrnambool Base Hospital, this bill reclassifies Warrnambool Base Hospital from a level 3 to a level 2 hospital in 2022–23 in recognition of the changing needs of the community and the different levels of care that will be required into the future. This is about being proactive, planning ahead and allowing enough time for implementation. We have had five years of solid forward planning and investment under this government, delivering real results for all Victorians. Since 2014 we have committed an unprecedented $7 billion in Victorian health infrastructure, delivering the largest health build program in Victorian history.

In the 2019–20 budget we are investing $1.8 billion, and this includes things like the new $1.5 billion Footscray Hospital—the largest ever health infrastructure in the state. With an increase of nearly 200 beds, it will treat approximately 1500 additional patients and enable an extra 20 000 people a year to be seen in the emergency department as well as building vital additional mental health capacity. Victoria has one of the best public health systems in the world, and this bill is another demonstration of it. I commend it to the house.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (12:41): I always relish the opportunity to get up in this house and speak about this government’s pedigree on supporting the health and wellbeing of Victorians, regional and city based. We have heard from many members on this side of the house about the investment that is the largest investment a state government has ever made in the health of Victorians, and it is quite an amazing thing. As a student of history, I look back and I try and figure out a bit of a correlation between the last time a government invested this much in the health of the state of Victoria, and there is no correlation. It is quite amazing.

Can I start off by acknowledging that nurses are the backbone of our healthcare system and probably none of us would be here without them. They are amazing. As a son of two former nurses, I know that at times it is hard work and it is demanding work, and they do not do it for the pay; they do it because they are passionate about helping people in their communities, often in their greatest time of need. This year we celebrate the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife too, coinciding with the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s birth as well. This bill acknowledges the significant contribution of every nurse, indeed every healthcare worker, in the state and the change they make in regard to the health and wellbeing of our community. It also presents us with a special opportunity to say thank you and that we will forever be grateful and will forever remember the contributions of nurses and the nursing staff during this COVID crisis. The word ‘unprecedented’ has been used many, many times. I would say that it is an accurate word, but to ask nurses to upend their lives—well, not even ask, to have them offer—to do so much above and beyond the call, to help Victoria and Australia in its time of need, shows how amazing they really are and also that we do have one of the best, if not the best, health systems in the world. The amendments in this bill will stand the test of history, I believe, as well.

As I have previously said, the Andrews Labor government has got quite the pedigree in regard to reform and certainly in the health sector as well. Just off the top of my head we have got the voluntary assisted dying reforms, the legislating safe access zones of 150 metres and the no jab, no play. But then if you put it in financial terms, we have heard the previous speaker, the minister, talk about $7 billion invested in the health build program. One of the projects that excites me the most in that program is the Frankston Hospital expansion, which is amazing. Many, many people over many years have lobbied quite hard for Frankston Hospital. It has a huge catchment, reaching out to my friends in Cranbourne and all the way down to the peninsula to our friends at the tip of the peninsula there. With a greatly skewed population of ageing community members down there, it is more important than ever that we are able to cater for them.

So the $562 million Frankston Hospital will be built. It is a dream for people, and people are starting to see it become a reality now with the land required for it under Peninsula Health control. That is soon to happen. That is a huge 11-storey building—extra mental health, oncology, special care nursery, maternity, more theatres, more beds, paediatrics and 11 floors, two of them dedicated to mental health. For those people—many of us—who have been affected by a family member with a mental health
issue and have made the visit to West Frankston, the staff there are amazing. We owe it to them to make it an amazing workplace for them to be able to work comfortably and professionally, to treat their clientele as well. We have made some improvements in the current building, but I know from the people I have spoken to in the health industry locally at Peninsula Health that they are very, very excited about this project.

Some of the other projects people are excited about—obviously we have heard a lot about them in this house, but it would be remiss of me not to mention them again: $29.6 million to expand the Sunshine emergency department; $63.2 million to expand the Monash Medical Centre emergency department; $115 million for Wonthaggi Hospital’s redevelopment; $135 million to expand Casey Hospital; $162.7 million to expand the Northern Hospital; and $1.5 billion for the new Footscray Hospital, which is the single largest hospital investment in the state’s history. Frankton can say that it has the largest redevelopment of a hospital outside the CBD in Victoria’s history as well. There is $31 million to expand the Royal Children’s Hospital’s emergency department and $461 million for Ballarat Base Hospital’s redevelopment as well. There are six new mental health crisis hubs connected to our emergency departments, all across the state: at Geelong, Monash Clayton, St Vincent’s, Sunshine and Royal Melbourne Hospital, along with Frankston as well. That is to the tune of $100 million. And there are 10 new or upgraded community hospitals across the state.

I recently had the chance to make the trip to Frankston Hospital. I was not planning it, but I can speak to the fact that they provide the highest level of care and professionalism that you would ever want. In seeing some of the images overseas during this crisis, nothing hits harder than that we do have one of the best health systems, and the backbone of the health system is our nurses. We need to do our best to make sure that they have the best satisfaction in their job, less burnout and greater intention to stay in these careers that help our community so much. We owe it to our communities to make sure we have got lower mortality rates especially for children, fewer readmissions, shorter lengths of stays and great patient satisfaction as well.

I would like to also mention one particular project at Frankston Hospital, and that is a project that involves Kenzo the labrador. The state government has partnered with Peninsula Health and also Guide Dogs Victoria to provide a pilot program, which involves Jenny and Kenzo. Jenny is the handler and Kenzo is the Director of Happiness. He has got his own badge, and he walks around Peninsula Health. His job is not necessarily to interact with patients; it is actually to help doctors. He will come in at the start of the day and he will have a conversation with doctors about some of the important issues of the day—things they might like to get off their chest, hard cases—and he earns that Director of Happiness badge every day, I believe. The smiles on people’s faces when he visits are quite amazing. That is also a peer-reviewed program. It could be a first for Australia, but it is certainly not the first internationally. We still do not know why animals like Kenzo are able to do what they do for humans, and we are hoping to prove on an evidence base that projects like this work.

We have also heard quite a bit of conjecture from those opposite about funding for certain hospitals. Frankston Hospital has not been without question. I think the latest diatribe was about that in the last budget there was $6 million that went into planning for the $562 million Frankston Hospital redevelopment. I do not think there are surprises there for anyone who actually builds these hospitals. It was quite surprising and quite a negative kind of tone around something that is very exciting and that will be a place where these nurse-to-patient ratios are helping our community and helping our nurses.

Once again can I take the time to thank all our health service workers, including the people that are cleaning and providing meals at these hospitals, for working up and preparing for the worst. Actually seeing that done on the ground is an amazing thing; to see people thinking and actually operating so fluidly in what are basically emergency situations and preparing themselves for an onslaught of some very, very sick people was quite amazing. The attitude is not, ‘We can be beaten’. Some of the nurses and CEOs that I was talking to were very upbeat. They were up for the challenge. They knew it was serious, but they are at the edge of the coalface. So thank you to all the people that work in our
hospitals, especially nurses and especially the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation’s Lisa Fitzpatrick for their consultation on this bill.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (12:51): It is always a pleasure to follow on from my friend the member for Frankston and reflect on all the extraordinary resources that the south-east of Melbourne is able to celebrate—Frankston Hospital and a new community hospital in Cranbourne that is going to be something that is welcomed by our community with not just joy but relief.

I am delighted to rise to speak in support of the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. I have been looking forward to the passage of this bill for weeks and certainly for days and hours knowing that this was coming. Like so many people, I feel fortunate to have been surrounded by formidable nurses, and if I get a chance, I will name a couple of the people who helped form me in my role here today.

In preparation for this contribution and in hearing about the excellent insights from my colleagues on this side of the chamber, I thought I would like to unpack the path that has got us to this place. How did we get here? It was the detailed policy work of the Minister for Health, working with the advice of her office and of course with the leadership of a Premier who has put the health and safety of our Victorian workforce at the front and centre of our reform agenda.

During the global COVID pandemic we have experienced as a community we have been incredibly grateful for the contribution of our nursing and midwifery professionals. I would like to quote Lisa Fitzpatrick from the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANMF)—she has had a few mentions here already today and will again hopefully as I have a chance later in my own opportunity to provide a contribution—when she did note that she did not think that the situation we were in was a result of luck but instead that it was actually because we have a rock-solid health system that has been well funded and of course staffed by highly skilled professionals because of the state’s contribution. But I would like in my contribution to reflect on the true grit and clinical brilliance of our professional nursing staff and the passion, perseverance and courage of the nursing profession as represented by the 90 000-strong membership of the ANMF.

This bill before us does a number of things. It improves nursing and midwifery workforce numbers in public hospitals and ensures maternal and child health nurses are optimally trained to deliver the best child, maternal and family-centred practice for the community. It builds on and is an extension of the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015, which legislated minimum nursing and midwifery staffing numbers in public hospitals to protect minimum workload arrangements for our dedicated healthcare system and is an achievement of our government’s commitment to uphold safety for both patients and nursing staff.

Phase 1 of this amendment introduced in March 2019 represented the first time since 2000 that nurse-to-patient ratios had been meaningfully reviewed. These reviews were intended to respond to increasing patient complexity and acuity and to the growing demand for health services in our communities. The key enhancements of phase 1 were to remove the incredibly outdated rounding methodology so nursing staff were no longer required to carry a workload that at times would exceed 50 per cent of their ratio. New ratios were established in key clinical and high acuity areas, and it is now time for phase 2, which will continue the improvements to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015. This bill will complete the removal of the rounding methodology to ensure that no nursing or midwifery staff will be required to exceed their present ratios. In addition to this, a supernumerary after-hours coordinator will be required in certain circumstances to acknowledge the increasing complexity and coordination of mixed services. All of these amendments are ultimately aimed at improving nursing and midwifery standards for their own safety and of course for the safety of patients. We will see 1100 new employment opportunities across Victoria’s public sector.
Back to the opportunity to pay credit to the grit and tenacity of our many nursing professionals and midwives, not just in hospitals, I am going to take the opportunity with your indulgence, Acting Speaker, to also pay credit to the extraordinary nurses and midwives who work in community settings, because this is where the true grit and passion of the profession is obvious. The nurses who work with and care for our homeless and vulnerable Victorians use their nous to make sure that those of our community who are living with blood-borne viruses like hepatitis C and HIV are taking their meds. I pay credit to the grit of the nurses who undertake outreach in parks and in squats to ensure that those with TB are getting access to care. I was until recently involved with an organisation that supports street sex workers in Melbourne, and I pay credit to the nurses who care for and ensure that Victorians who have a role as sex workers get access to the sort of care that they deserve, that we all deserve. I take the opportunity to pay credit to the nurses who care in whatever setting for people who are experiencing mental ill health. I pay credit to those who toil in our hospitals on the wards, in the critical care units and in our emergency departments. I pay credit of course to our reproductive healthcare nurses. The true grit and passion of the industrial arm of the profession who form the ANMF inspires me every day. Now, some talk about nurses being soft and gentle, and that is something that many and some nurses are, but that is not actually the trait that has got us here to this place today. These life-saving reforms for our health system have been fought for time and again when the ANMF have provided the evidence from research that has led us to this path. So this legislation is a credit to Lisa Fitzpatrick, Paul Gilbert and Pip Carew, and it is very hard for me to mention nurses in the ANMF without paying credit to Rachel Halse, a special friend to so many in this place.

I am going to take a parochial path though and thank the nurses and midwives of the Cranbourne community and take the opportunity to acknowledge those who work at the Cranbourne Integrated Care Centre. But I am also going to take the opportunity to acknowledge four special nurses, some of whom I brought in here for afternoon tea to thank them for their long, enduring, hard and tireless passion for the profession: Hannah Sellers, Liz Barton, Thelma Stratov and Reason Murungweni.

Hannah Sellers is a woman who is known to many of us for her role at the ANMF and a person who sat in this place and watched in previous years the passage of legislation that had been debated, legislation that has brought reform, and I am very pleased to have Hannah as a constituent of my community. I asked Hannah what her views were, and she told me that after many years of industrial negotiations, nurses and midwives are close to securing minimum staff-to-patient ratios, which will be mandated in legislation. Hannah says the bullying tactics and intimidation from hospital managers, health department officials and employer representatives threatening to send them to jail were not enough to discourage nurses and midwives from continuing their fight for proper staffing levels to safeguard the Victorian community. The voices of the 90 000-strong members of the ANMF had been heard by the Andrews government.

I would like to acknowledge Liz Barton, who tells me she started nursing when she was 17 years old. I hope she does not mind me saying that she is very close to retirement and has been putting off retirement because she wanted to see the passage of this legislation, something that she has worked tirelessly for in her career. She started nursing with eight weeks training and was then thrown into the deep end and in charge—five nurses could be responsible for as many as 45 patients at one time. Liz acknowledges that patients are extremely more complex in today’s society—living longer, sicker and with more comorbidities.

I would like to pay credit to Thelma Stratov, who spoke to me with great passion of her role in the great strike of 1986 where the union established picket lines and had tents and caravans outside hospitals in metropolitan and regional Victoria. We stand on your shoulders.

I would also like to pay credit to Reason Murungweni from Cranbourne West, a man I met at a local community event who has taken on Australian citizenship and spoke to me about the power of a well-resourced health system and his great passion for his role.
I am overwhelmed by the nurses of Cranbourne, but I would also like to acknowledge Tracey Maxwell, a constituent of the member for Ringwood, not because she delivered my daughters, which she did, but because she is always fighting for women and children in maternity wards who need more care.

In these last few seconds I would like to pay credit to the love I have experienced in my own family from some powerful nurses. My rock-solid brother; my caring and kind sister, Maree; my 94-year-old aunt; and my hilariously practical cousin Jenny. I would like to acknowledge Angela Phillips, a clever professional midwife who never misses an opportunity to tell me how much the mothers and babies in her care at Monash deserve the best resources. And I would also like to acknowledge and remember my late, departed mother-in-law, a woman who fought hard for women’s reproductive rights at a time that put her at risk of criminality.

Sitting suspended 1.01 pm until 2.02 pm.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (14:02): It is a pleasure to have so many of my colleagues join me for the resumption of play. Please stay! Do not all escape.

The Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020 is a really critical bill. Nurses and midwives are the backbone of our health system and help ensure we get the best possible care when we need it most. The extraordinary professionals who work as nurses and midwives deserve nothing but the highest level of support and respect from our community. If this bill becomes law, it will not only give effect to an election promise but also make sure nurses and midwives have the time to give every patient the care and attention they deserve.

This bill comes before the house at a very interesting time in the world. Obviously the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the entire world particularly hard. We have been thankful in Victoria that we have only had approximately 1800 cases and fewer than 20 deaths, and hopefully that remains that way. But overseas the numbers are horrendous. I saw this morning that in the UK numbers had passed 300,000 confirmed cases with more than 40,000 deaths and in the US more than 2 million cases with more than 100,000 deaths.

A preliminary study by the Medical Journal of Australia suggests that, based on the cases that they had looked at in late March and early April, 10 per cent of the positive cases had occurred in healthcare workers. Similar studies been done in the UK and Spain back in March suggest that this was consistent and numbers were in excess of 10 per cent—more than 10 per cent of all diagnosed cases were healthcare workers. When you translate that to the death rate that we are seeing in some of those countries it just goes to show how much at risk our healthcare workers have been at the forefront, dealing with this pandemic every day for many days, for months in many cases, putting themselves at risk every day. We are lucky. We stand here, it is a socially distanced chamber, and the extraordinary measures that we and the Parliament have put in place for our own safety make me reflect on the safety measures that were put in place for the healthcare workers and what they needed to deal with.

I also want to take this opportunity to give a special shout-out to all the nurses and midwives and other healthcare workers in our own Box Hill community. Box Hill obviously has a very large health precinct, the Box Hill Hospital being one of the key hospitals in the Eastern Health network, and alongside it is the private Epworth Eastern. Obviously with the recent changes and the bringing together of the private and the public hospital systems these two major hospital systems in the eastern suburbs have been working together to make sure that we have been COVID-ready.

There is also a major development happening in the health sector in Box Hill, which I would like to mention at this opportunity, and that is a landmark agreement between Epworth Eastern, the Salvation Army and Box Hill Institute. The Salvation Army is moving out of its old premises and moving to a new site on Whitehorse Road, and in its place, which is next door to the existing Epworth Eastern, a new 14-storey hospital medical centre will be built. As part of that, not only will there be new beds, new jobs and new medical staff, but they are working with Box Hill Institute for new training places
and specifically new training for nursing. The Box Hill Institute runs a nursing course. It will be a full system for healthcare workers. It is not just about providing the healthcare service to the patient in the ward, but it is also training our future healthcare workers.

The bill that is before us today builds upon the legislation that was passed in 2015 to establish minimum nurse and midwife staffing levels in public hospitals. Indeed it was one of the first things that the newly elected Andrews Labor government considered upon its election, and today we build on that. I am delighted to support this further progress towards a better healthcare system for all Victorians.

The bill will complete the method used for rounding across remaining shifts to ensure consistency in the staff workload determination throughout the act. What this will mean in practice is more nurses and midwives when and where they are needed, and it will mean an even higher level of individual patient care. Staffing numbers will also increase because there will be an in-charge nurse or midwife across numerous clinical settings. This will especially be the case during the evening, when there are patients with high needs who require that high-level care at all hours, day or night. This will help make sure those parents especially have the individualised attention they deserve.

The bill will also reclassify the Warrnambool Base Hospital as a level 2 hospital. This shows our commitment to delivering the best possible health outcomes for all Victorians no matter where they live. It will mean more staffing in surgical wards for the Warrnambool community. And for small hospitals the application of ratios will be amended to include the requirement to staff a hospital with an after-hours coordinator. The bill will also make changes to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015, which was also introduced by this government in its previous term. The amendments will enshrine into legislation the most stringent qualification for maternal and child health services nurses. In this state, unlike any other, maternal and child health nurses must be triple qualified. They must be a registered nurse, a registered midwife and hold a postgraduate qualification in maternal and child health nursing.

Maternal and child health services have played a key role in our state for over a century. Any member, particularly those who have had children, will be quite familiar with the maternal and child health network. It certainly was my first exposure to that system. I remember bringing our firstborn home. Coming out of the hospital you just really do not know what to do, frankly. You are at a bit of a loss, and my wife and I have been eternally grateful that, probably within 24 hours of us returning home, we had the maternal and child health nurse come over to our house to come and check us out and tell us what we were doing and say, ‘Just keep calm; you’re doing everything okay’—that reassurance. Over time the visits were fortnightly and then monthly, then three-monthly and then eventually two years before a visit and now they are all gone. All the visits are gone. It is just so fantastic to have that reassurance through those early years that you know what you are doing as a parent is the right thing and being ready and on the lookout for anything that you might need to follow up.

This government has done an amazing job in rebuilding our health system. It has ended the war with paramedics. We have managed to secure fair agreements with paramedics as well as nurses and midwives without protracted and bitter disputes. This is what a constructive relationship and mutual respect delivers, and at the end of the day it means better outcomes for patients. I am delighted to support this bill because nurses and midwives are the backbone of our health system. Every health professional plays a vital role, but it is the nurse or midwife and patient who will likely have the most interaction. It is the nurse who will notice the seemingly small symptom that could mean something worse, and it is the midwife who will be there for new parents every step of the way. The healthcare system that we have in Victoria is among the world’s best and just as importantly is accessible for all Victorians. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (14:12): It is my pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. There has never been a government in Victoria more committed to nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios than the Andrews
Labor government. Enshrining nurse- and midwife-to-patient staffing ratios into law in 2015 is a proud achievement of our government and one we are deeply committed to. Higher staffing numbers lead to a more engaged workforce and better patient care and outcomes.

Members will recall that the last time those opposite were in government they waged an industrial war with our nurses and engaged in protracted and delayed negotiations. The Liberals had no plan for staffing ratios, and Victorians know they cannot be trusted on health. Their modus operandi is to cut, close and privatise. We have seen it before, and if ever given the chance they will do it again. While they sought to impose cut after cut on Victoria’s health services and wage industrial war with our frontline healthcare heroes ordinary Victorians suffered, and long ambulance response times cost Victorians their lives.

Thankfully, we have now had five years of solid investment under this government, delivering real results for all Victorians. We have invested $12.4 billion for hospital operating budgets in 2019–20 alone, including our record $200 million flu package. Hospitals are now receiving 40 per cent more funding than they did in 2013–14, when those opposite were last in office. Since 2014 we have committed an unprecedented $7 billion in Victorian health infrastructure, delivering the largest health build program in Victorian history: $1.5 billion for the new Footscray Hospital, the largest ever health infrastructure in the state and, on a very personal level for me, over $460 million to completely revamp the Ballarat Base Hospital, creating a new emergency department, a modernised acute mental health facility, an intensive care unit, a women and children’s hub, an expanded critical care hot floor and at least an extra 100 inpatient beds.

This bill is about ratios. The thing is that ratios are really, at base, about protecting patient safety. Nurses tell us that ratios matter. Ratios allow them to provide the quality care that Victorians expect and deserve. We recognise the commitment of our hardworking nurses and midwives to support us, our families and our friends. We took to the 2018 election further commitments to protect and strengthen ratios in two stages. The first phase of amendments to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 passed this Parliament in March 2019, representing the first time that nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios had been meaningfully reviewed since their beginning in 2000. It removed the outdated rounding methodology on most shifts so that in most cases nurses and midwives were no longer required to carry a workload that can at times be 50 per cent greater than the ratios set out in the act. It also established new ratios in key clinical practice areas.

It was backed up with funding required to deliver 600 additional nurses and midwives employed in public hospitals across Victoria. The introduction of this bill today delivers on phase 2 of our election commitment and delivers further improvements to see an additional 500 nurses and midwives employed in our public health system, from our busiest metropolitan hospitals to our rural services, taking this to a total of 1100 extra nurses and midwives.

In my region the diploma of nursing is the most popular priority TAFE course being offered at Federation University TAFE as part of our government’s free TAFE initiative, and I understand that the first round of graduates will leave FedUni TAFE at the end of this year with those qualifications. This bill will complete the rounding methodology across remaining shifts and settings to create consistency in staffing workload determinations throughout the act. This will mean improved staffing in residential aged care and rehabilitation wards.

Consultation was undertaken with peak industry representatives throughout the drafting of this bill. This was to identify and prevent any unforeseen consequences within hospitals. Staffing numbers will also increase through the provision of an in-charge nurse or midwife across a range of settings, particularly on a night shift, to reduce clinical risk, improve patient safety and ensure patient and staff wellbeing. These arrangements will apply to medical and surgical wards, birthing suites, postnatal wards, special care nurseries, geriatric evaluation management wards and larger emergency departments (EDs) with short-stay observation units.
What is particularly important to me as a regional MP is that this will really have a big impact on our smaller regional hospitals. So not so much the Ballarat Base Hospital, obviously a very large hospital, but in my area there are smaller regional hospitals, and they will benefit from the additional after-hours coordinator, acknowledging the increasing complexity of coordinating a range of services in these hospitals. This bill will boost the quality and safety of health services in regional areas. The changes will specifically apply to level 4 hospitals that operate a nominating birthing suite and/or emergency department with greater than 2500 presentations per annum.

Last week I was chatting to Allan Townsend, who is the Ballarat regional organiser for the ANMF, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. Allan is based in Ballarat Trades Hall. We had a conversation about this, and he was really forceful about how important these changes are. I can appreciate that people can suggest that it is a rounding and it is just tweaking at the edges, but after talking to Allan, particularly in those small hospitals, I know it is going to make a real fundamental difference. We were talking about, for example, Beaufort hospital. Beaufort hospital’s ratio has one nurse on overnight. Now, for that person there is a limited ED there and there are acute services there, so potentially you have got one person who is looking after an acute ward and then having to rush out when an emergency comes into the ED. Whilst some may say that this is a small thing of rounding, the difference that that can make will be huge. And of course it is not just that rounding. It is not just about the 50 per cent; it is also about providing those additional staff.

From my perspective I can understand how important it is to the regions and, as I say, Allan was incredibly positive about it all. As he described it to me, we know that lower nurse-to-patient ratios mean lower patient mortality, fewer readmissions, shorter length of stays, fewer ICU admissions, fewer health care-associated infections, fewer falls with injuries, and the list goes on. So this is going to have a really significant impact on the ratios, but also this bill relates to maternal welfare workers, and it is going to make a huge difference.

It was interesting listening to the member for Box Hill talk about his experience of coming home, and I think many of us in this house will know that feeling of coming home with a small baby and not knowing what you are doing. For me it was actually not only a new baby but a new country. I had moved back with a one-month-old who was born in London, and we came back here and the services that those maternal and child health workers provided were really, really important for me in a new country. I did not know where I was, I did not know where to get help and they were just amazing. To support them through this bill is very important. It introduces amendments to protect the high quality of our maternal and child health services, prescribing MCH qualifications into legislation.

As I say, my child was born in London. Not to speak ill of the National Health Service, which tries very hard, but the comparison of the care that I got from those nurses in Australia was really, really noticeable once we came back. I think that is in part because we are the only state in the country that requires maternal and child health nurses to be triple qualified. I commend this bill to ensure that that continues, as I say, having been a recipient of that great service.

Look, the pandemic has put significant pressure on hospitals and health staff. Nurses and midwives are the backbone of our healthcare system, dedicating their lives to caring for others. In 2020 we celebrate the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, coinciding with the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s birth. We will forever remember this year as one where nurses and midwives demonstrated extraordinary commitment through their care, compassion and capability during the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill acknowledges the significant contribution those professionals made.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (14:22): It is my pleasure to rise today to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. I have spoken many times in this chamber about how I came to be in this place, and a big part of that story has been about how many Labor governments have delivered in health. As I constantly remind this house, I was of course the head of the Victorian Ambulance Union when we finally saw the end of the attacks on paramedics and frontline health workers when the Andrews Labor government finally gave them the respect they
deserved and which they never received from the previous coalition government. They imposed constant cuts to Victoria’s health services. The industrial war they created, which I was involved in, along with our other frontline healthcare heroes, lasted far too long and resulted in everyday Victorians suffering as we saw the worst ambulance response times in Victoria’s history and attacks on many healthcare workers that put Victorian lives at risk.

The disrespect shown to our healthcare workers saw former Liberal MPs flipping the bird to nurses who were trying to end the prolonged negotiations as they struggled to achieve pay parity with their interstate colleagues. I remember too well my members, our state’s hardworking and trusted paramedics, were called ‘thugs’ and ‘hard-line’. These were the best trained but worst paid paramedics in Australia, and they had a government who disrespected them publicly. Was it any surprise then that Victoria had the worst paramedic attrition rate in the nation at 4.2 per cent in 2013–14? Those attacks finally ended when the Andrews Labor government took control and finally started to treat Victoria’s healthcare workers with respect and valued Victorians’ lives, welfare and health.

Along with fixing the ambulance crisis, I was happy when in 2015 nurse- and midwife-to-patient staffing ratios were finally enshrined in Victorian law. This showed the government’s commitment to healthcare workers and all Victorians. There has never been a government in Victoria more committed to nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios than this Andrews Labor government. It was only right that these ratios were enshrined into law so that never again should nurses and midwives be forced to negotiate this important safety measure for Victorians into their enterprise bargaining agreements. We know that higher staffing numbers lead to a more engaged workforce as well as better patient care and outcomes. It just makes sense. I was proud when we made election commitments in 2018 to further protect and strengthen ratios in two stages.

Of course, we on this side all remember March 2019 when we delivered on that election commitment by introducing the first phase of amendments to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015. The packed gallery of so many hardworking nurses and midwives definitely made it difficult for anyone to forget. They were here that day to see the legislation pass, because they remembered the Liberals and Nationals denying this important legislation. That first delivery removed the outdated rounding methodology on most shifts so that, in most circumstances, nurses and midwives were no longer required to carry out workloads that could mean a 50 per cent greater ratio than was set out in the act. But of course it is Labor governments that deliver not only commitments but back them up, with the funding required to deliver 600 additional nurses and midwives to be employed in public hospitals right across Victoria.

The introduction of this bill today delivers on the second phase of our election commitment: to deliver further improvements to see a further 500 nurses and midwives employed in our public health system. Let us be clear: that is a total of 1100 extra nurses and midwives. There has never been a clearer example in our living memory of exactly how important that is for the capacity of our health system. We have seen an investment of $50 million to create a Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund that has already been attracting record numbers of applications. The registered nurse and midwife graduate program has been established to provide a statewide enrolled nurse graduate program. This program is backed up with the Andrews Labor government’s record investment in TAFE that will see 100 of 400 enrolled nurses employed over the next four years come from TAFE graduates. The diploma of nursing is one of the most popular priority TAFE courses being offered as part of our government’s free TAFE initiative. With the current health issues that we are seeing not just in Victoria but worldwide, it makes absolute sense that more Victorians will be able to study a diploma of nursing for free at TAFE, then start working as an enrolled nurse as soon as they graduate.

The fund also provides up to 400 postgraduate scholarships for current nurses and midwives to upgrade their skills. There are 400 places in programs such as the postgraduate midwifery employment program, as well as refresher programs for 800 nurses and midwives currently registered but not practising so they can re-enter the workforce. We are also seeing investment in our rural and regional communities. There is provision of $10 million in this fund dedicated to rural and regional applicants
so that people can study a diploma of nursing at their local TAFE and then work at their local rural or regional hospital.

I mentioned earlier the attack on paramedics the last time the Liberals were in government. They also waged industrial war with our nurses, engaging in protracted and delayed negotiations in an attempt to remove ratios from the enterprise agreements. This is despite what we know: that ratios are important to protect patient safety. There is little disagreement globally about the relationship between nurse staffing levels and patient outcomes in healthcare settings. Recent research conducted by the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing has found lower hospital patient-to-nurse ratios are associated with lower mortality, fewer readmissions, shorter lengths of stay, greater patient satisfaction, greater nurse job satisfaction, less burnout and greater intent to stay.

On this side of the house we do not attack our frontline healthcare workers; we recognise the commitment of our hardworking nurses and midwives. The work they do to support us, our families and friends at times of need is valued. Never has this been clearer than now during this pandemic. We respect their commitment, and Victoria’s frontline health workers know that they have never had better support than what they have received from this government. Unfortunately they know that when those opposite are given the opportunity to govern, all they can expect is cuts, closures and privatisation. Those of us who have worked in health care remember clearly cuts to Victoria’s health care, industrial wars and record privatisation that delivered profits for private enterprise but record low morale and devastating consequences for Victorians, such as the shameful response times seen during the Baillieu-Napthine era. There is nothing more morale-destroying for Victorian health workers than to see their patients’ health and lives put at risk. I know that Victoria’s hardworking healthcare workers are thankful that we have now had five years of solid investment under this government, delivering real results to all Victorians.

We should never forget what an alternative government looks like. It was the Kennett government that privatised the emergency dispatch system that was the subject of a royal commission; privatised non-emergency patient transport; privatised some ambulance branches, like Cranbourne, which they intended to roll out across the state; and slashed paramedic jobs. That government’s decisions ultimately cost lives in Victoria.

Our government has delivered a record $1 billion investment in Victoria’s ambulance service, funding hundreds more paramedics, more ambulance stations and more emergency response vehicles across the state. It was a great pleasure recently to be with the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services before the pandemic hit opening the brand-new ambulance station in Bacchus Marsh and to see firsthand the real difference that this government makes by investing in health and ambulance services.

The government has invested $12.4 billion in hospital operating budgets in 2019–20 alone, including our record $200 million for a flu package. Hospitals are now receiving 40 per cent more funding than they did in 2013–14 when the Liberals were last in office. And since 2014 we have committed an unprecedented $7 billion in Victorian health expenditure, delivering the largest health build program in Victorian history.

In my electorate, in Melton, we have seen $2.4 million allocated for the planning and delivery of a new Melton hospital. Naysayers would claim that they would never see a hospital delivered in Melton; we now have the $2.4 million allocated as part of the state budget. We have also heard the announcement that Western Health will operate the future Melton hospital and have recently seen the survey open up for my constituents to have their say on what services they would like. Already that survey has received 1000 responses. I am glad that the new hospital in Melton will not only deliver much-needed health care in the west but that those receiving care will know that their nurses, midwives and other frontline healthcare workers are supported by this government with adequate nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios.
As well as the planning for a new hospital, the hospital in Bacchus Marsh has previously seen investment from the Andrews Labor government, with $10.6 million invested to expand and refurbish maternity and surgical services in a major boost to patient care. The investment this government makes in health care is leading to more jobs in the health system. Since coming to office we have created 2600 full-time doctor positions, 6500 full-time nursing and midwifery roles and of course 800 full-time paramedic roles.

Finally, like many of my colleagues, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to the astonishing nurses and midwives and all of our healthcare professionals who have demonstrated extraordinary commitment through their care, compassion and capability during the COVID-19 pandemic. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (14:32): It is with some profound privilege that I rise today to speak on this particular bill. I must say from the outset it is always exceptionally difficult to follow any contribution made by the member for Melton, particularly when it relates to Victoria’s healthcare system. I certainly acknowledge his very, very long and profound commitment to the Victorian healthcare system and indeed his advocacy really over a number of decades to make sure that particularly our ambulance service is geared up to be able to respond to the needs of all Victorians. I certainly wish to acknowledge him for that.

In reflecting on the elements of this particular bill I started reflecting on my mother. My mother spent some, I think, 45 years as a nurse and as a midwife. Indeed, when she entered that noble profession back in the 1950s all training of nurses was conducted in hospitals. She, from an early age, wanted to be a nurse and was ultimately successful in spending almost all of her working life from the very first job she had as a nurse working in that very noble profession. From that point in the 1950s right through to now there has of course been significant reform to that occupation. If you reflect on the type of training they had in the 1950s, where it was very much workplace training, I think you could probably very much reflect on nursing back then as an apprenticeship-style training system. It was not called that, but elements of the training back then were of that note.

She, in her mid-career, ended up going back to university to convert her nursing experience and the type of qualification she had into a degree. Of course many nurses throughout those 50 years very much made very similar decisions to continue to upgrade their qualifications to ensure that they were as best equipped as they could be to provide care for the community that they served and for the patients that they dealt with and their families. In reflecting on a very, very strong union culture, a culture where they stick together and they work hard to improve their profession, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation has worked tirelessly over their entire existence to professionalise their occupation, to train their nurses and to ensure that their members are as best equipped as possible to do the work that is required.

All of us in our jobs have our days when we are exceptionally busy. When you think about it from a nursing perspective, where things can come out of nowhere and often from many different directions all at once, it can be under those circumstances exceptionally difficult to be able to treat the patients before you in a logical and sensible order and utilising all of the knowledge that you have. One of the important mechanisms that the union has sought and campaigned hard for, along with their members of course, is to put in place nurse-to-patient ratios. It is an important control mechanism to make sure that those nurses, as much as possible, have sensible and safe ratios to enable them to do their work, to care for their patients and to make sure that their patients and of course their families and their communities are indeed well treated and cared for.

When I come back to reflecting on my mother’s career—she has had some 45 years in the nursing profession—I recall the various jurisdictions that she has been able to work in as a nurse. She has worked throughout Australia, particularly in Victoria, where she was born and bred; she has nursed in New Zealand, where she lived for some 15 years; she has nursed in Papua New Guinea and Bougainville; and she has nursed in Timor-Leste. I think many nurses have had that opportunity with
their training, given how well recognised Victorian nurses are. My mother had that opportunity to take her qualifications and to practise her vocation in other jurisdictions. When she reflects on her career—she has written a book on nursing—and she recalls the circumstances that she experienced in the workplace, there is no doubt that Victoria is a great place to nurse. We have a fantastic Victorian healthcare system, and we have a fantastic union that has campaigned relentlessly to make sure that nurses are the best that they can be for all Victorians.

It is a profound consequence for every member of Parliament and certainly there is a profound obligation on us as members of the Andrews Labor government that we continue to strive to make those necessary reforms to ensure that our nurses continue to be the best that they can be, because ultimately these arrangements and other arrangements that we will no doubt introduce into this place are about building the occupation of nursing, building the industrial arrangements, building the legislative capacity and building our healthcare system to make it the very, very best. When I reflect on the pandemic crisis that the globe is facing and recognise the outstanding contribution that nurses have made in gearing up their health systems to make sure that our health system can respond to that global pandemic, I do genuinely want to pass on my thanks to nurses.

My seat actually has a very high proportion of nurses living in it. I have been aware of that for a very long time. It is something that I noticed from the last ABS statistics, and on my behalf I wish to pass on my thanks to every single one of those nurses who has invested in themselves to become the best nurse that they can be to keep our communities safe and to keep all of our families in the best possible health. I would like to certainly acknowledge that.

Of course that is our track record and we as the Andrews Labor government will continue to work closely with our nurses throughout the Victorian community, but when I look at the Liberal Party and I reflect upon what they have done over many decades when they have been given that fine gift of government, what I do see unfortunately is a political party who wishes to chip away at our healthcare system. They wish to erode it and they tend to make those cuts at every opportunity they are given for government. These ratios are important for our healthcare system—

Mr Morris: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have been fairly forbearing in terms of the member’s contribution, but he needs to return to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Fregon): The member’s time has expired.

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (14:42): What a privilege it is today to be able to contribute to this bill, the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. I remember in this place back in 2015 being able to contribute to the act which was then the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Bill 2015, which of course is now law.

We promised before the 2014 election to bring in laws for nurse-to-patient ratios, and we absolutely delivered on that promise. At the time I remember speaking on that bill and saying it was for the first time in Australia that we were introducing these ratios. I think it was second in the world only perhaps to California, but even the legislation that we were introducing at that time was probably the most sophisticated and thorough in terms of nurse-to-patient ratios.

I recall the euphoria after that bill passed and the feedback I got from many in the profession, many nurses and midwives who were just overwhelmed that we had brought into law these ratios. It means now that nurses and midwives never have to bargain away their wages and conditions for patient care and safety, and that is an extraordinary thing to be able to say now. I just look forward to the time when it is a given that we have ratios and we will not even remember when they were introduced, it will just be an expectation that these ratios are there in our public health services, our public hospitals to ensure that Victorians are getting the best possible health care that they can. Let us hope that in time we might see similar ratios rolled out in our aged-care facilities as well.
We know that ratios save lives. Of course we listened to the experts, and that is why we brought into this place those laws and we passed those laws. But it is always important to continue to assess those ratios, to take independent advice to ensure that minimum safe nursing and midwifery staffing ratios reflect the changing needs and demands on our healthcare system and services and they reflect the changing needs in patient complexity and changing models of care. We are going to see changes in our regional areas as well, as there will be shifts in demand for various health services out there.

Given the importance of nurse-to-patient ratios and midwife-to-patient ratios to ensure ongoing safe patient care in our hospitals, in our special care nurseries, in our maternity wards, in our oncology wards, in our haematology wards and in our aged-care facilities, it is absolutely appropriate that any change to these ratios is scrutinised by Parliament. That is obviously to protect those ratios, and to ensure that ratios cannot be changed simply by delegation. I think not only does the nursing and midwifery profession deserve that but all Victorians deserve that as well. That is why we are here today discussing this bill, which will deliver phase 2 of the Andrews Labor government’s election commitment to amend the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 to further improve and expand these ratios for our Victorian public hospitals. The ratios will be implemented in different stages. This will obviously give time for our health services to be able to implement those changes but also, importantly, to recruit more nurses and midwives.

In terms of the operation of the bill, by 2023 we will have removed the rounding methodology, and that is going to create consistency in staffing workload under the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act. What does that mean in practice? If the number of patients in a ward is not divisible into a whole number, the number of nurses or the number of midwives must be rounded up to the nearest whole number and the hospital must roster an additional nurse or midwife to comply with this ratio. This will extend to cover all shifts for acute stroke, haematology and oncology wards as well as aged high-care residential wards and night shifts for rehabilitation wards.

There will also be some staffing number increases in what is called ‘in-charge’ nurses and midwives. Those people are responsible for the coordination role, so they do the planning and the managing of activities in the unit, which might cover things like admissions, discharges and other procedures. The amendments in this bill stipulate that a nurse in charge or a midwife in charge must also be on duty in some clinical setting shifts that currently do not have them. That will see an additional nurse or midwife in charge to support staffing flexibility in general, medical and surgery wards, postnatal wards, special care nurseries and geriatric evaluation wards on the night shift; in hospitals with six or more birthing suites on the afternoon or night shift; and in short-stay observation areas.

These are really important changes. They are about improving patient care, safety and wellbeing. I have to say that when you consider health and health services, when you are talking about funding and investing in public health, it is a choice, and the Andrews Labor government has made that choice to prioritise health funding for better health care for all Victorians, because Victorians deserve this. This is something we rightly deserve, and it is something we pride ourselves on. Our public health system is world-class.

I would like to thank our more than 90 000 nurses and midwives in Victoria. About 50 000 of those work in our public health system and many, many of them live in my electorate. These are female-dominated professions. In Victoria about 90 per cent of nurses and midwives are female. These are extraordinary individuals. They have undertaken significant education and training. They are absolute professionals. They are health experts across so many areas, and they are part of a profession that carries an enormous responsibility. They are called upon to perform to the highest standards of care in often very stressful, quite extraordinary situations, and they protect the public in both clinical and non-clinical settings.

Of course they also perform other invaluable roles, whether it is teaching, supervising or assessing students and other nurses to develop the nursing workforce. They participate in vital research to inform
our quality health care and policy development. They work tirelessly to promote the health and wellbeing of all Victorians, and of course they put the health and safety of Victorians first.

We know that the coronavirus pandemic placed enormous pressure on our health system and our health staff to plan for increased patient workload, and the response from our nurses and midwives has been extraordinary throughout this pandemic, and I would like to acknowledge the incredible work that they have done to maintain our healthcare services at the extraordinary standard that they have.

We have seen in the five years since we have been in government an increase in the number of nurses and midwives to 15.6 per cent, or 6570 new positions, and we are now funding an extra 1100 nurses and midwives in Victoria. We know the diploma of nursing is one of the most popular free TAFE courses in Victoria, and last year I was very fortunate to meet with the first cohort of nurses participating in the free TAFE program at Chisholm Institute in Frankston—a very excited bunch of new students, many of whom could not have undertaken that course if we had not provided it as part of the free TAFE initiative.

Since 2014 we have committed a record $7 billion in hospital and Victorian health infrastructure. Of course our massive half-billion-dollar redevelopment of Frankston Hospital is going to make an enormous difference for my local community—an additional 120 beds, two new operating theatres, a massive expansion of child and maternal health services, more support for cancer patients and two floors dedicated entirely to mental health services.

Better health care for all Victorians is this government’s priority. We are investing in the future of Victoria, we respect the work of our dedicated nurses and midwives, and I am delighted to commend this bill to the house.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) (14:52): It is a great honour to rise today to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020 and to do so in the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife and a year that was decreed also to celebrate and coincide with the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale. In preparing for this speech I was able to do a little bit of research into the life of Florence Nightingale, and I thank the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation for their press release on International Nurses Day where they quote Florence Nightingale’s biographer Mark Bostridge. He said that Florence Nightingale was not a fan of the sentimental image of her as the lady with the lamp and that she deemed that image ‘all that ministering angel nonsense’.

As I delved in and learned a little bit more about Florence Nightingale, of course not only was she the founder of modern nursing but she relentlessly pursued the evidence. She gathered and analysed data. She did this on the disease-related deaths of British soldiers in Turkey during the Crimean War. Back in England, having proved the connection between poor sanitation and disease, she was instrumental in the introduction of the UK’s public health act and of widespread sanitation and sewerage being connected in the UK. So we do owe a lot to Florence Nightingale, and I thank the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation for their press release on International Nurses Day where they quote Florence Nightingale’s biographer Mark Bostridge. He said that Florence Nightingale was not a fan of the sentimental image of her as the lady with the lamp and that she deemed that image “all that ministering angel nonsense”.

The bill also presents us with an opportunity to say thank you, and of course we will forever remember this year of the pandemic when nurses and midwives demonstrated once again their extraordinary commitment to and care for people of our community. Indeed it was my pleasure last month, on 12 May, to share my appreciation with the nurses across Central Highlands Rural Health at the Kyneton hospital and at the Daylesford hospital. I would love to have gone and visited them. That was not possible, so I sent them some flowers as a way of showing my appreciation, and I cannot wait to get back and thank them in person for their extraordinary work. Up in my electorate it was at our
hospitals that our nurses moved very quickly to establish COVID testing clinics at Kyneton and Daylesford to ensure those of us in regional Victoria were also able to access testing.

We all know that Victoria has one of the world’s best public healthcare systems. This does not come about by accident. You only get a world-class healthcare system if you are prepared to invest, and as my friend the member for Carrum has noted, investing in health is a choice that you make and it is a choice that Labor governments have always made. But what a contrast to those on the other side, who when given the opportunity to form government, to lead our state, had a choice. They could invest or they could cut, and one thing that is always clear is that given that choice those on the other side will cut. They will cut funding to our hospitals and healthcare agencies. They will cut funding to our ambulance service. I mean, I heard also my friend the member for Melton—

Mr Morris: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the debate this afternoon has largely kept to the subject under discussion, the bill. The member on her feet now is straying quite widely from that point, and I ask you to bring her back to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Fregon): There is no point of order, but I ask the member to come back to the subject of the bill.

Ms Thomas: The point of this bill is it once again demonstrates that it is only Labor governments who invest in health care, and in determining nurse-to-patient ratios through legislation we are indeed delivering on that commitment by ensuring that the quality of health care in our health services continues to improve by ensuring the appropriate nurse-patient ratios at any given time.

As people know, the first phase of amendments to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 were passed in March 2019 and represent the first time that nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios had been meaningfully reviewed since their beginning in 2000, and we sought to remove the outdated rounding methodology on most shifts so that in most circumstances nurses and midwives were no longer required to carry a workload that could at times be 50 per cent greater than the ratio set out in the act. It also established new ratios in clinical practice areas.

The introduction of this bill today delivers on phase 2 of our election commitment and will deliver further improvements to see a further 500 nurses and midwives employed in our public health system, from our busiest metropolitan hospitals to our rural services, taking this to a total of 1100 extra nurses and midwives. This is commitment to growing the world’s best public health service here in Victoria. That is what the Andrews Labor government has worked relentlessly to do, and that is what we will continue to do, and the people of Victoria know full well that if you want a government that is going to invest in health care, then you can only trust a Labor government to deliver on those commitments.

My colleagues have gone through many of the points of the bill, but I did want to reiterate how excited I am that the diploma of nursing is proving to be one of our most popular priority TAFE courses—free TAFE—particularly because it has been so attractive to many women in my electorate, many of whom have taken breaks from work in order to have their families and care for their children but who now see, through the commitment of the Andrews Labor government, an opportunity for them to pursue long-held dreams to access qualifications and to join our fantastic healthcare system. This is a government that is doing the workforce development, putting the funding in place and enshrining the ratios in order to deliver a great healthcare system.

I did want to just make a note and give a shout-out to nurses who have been a big part of my life. I have many friends who are nurses, and I thank them for everything that they have done. But recently, Acting Speaker Bull, as you would know, I had to visit three health services over the Christmas-New Year period—both public and private, I might say—in order to attend to my broken ankle, and I was treated with great care at all three of those health services by the nurses. I was also treated by New South Wales paramedics. Despite the fact that I had had a dose of morphine, I was still compos enough to have a conversation in which basically the ambos said to me they were very envious that I was a Victorian, and indeed they wanted to be ambos in Victoria because they understood that it was a Labor
government in Victoria that would stand up and speak out and deliver for our fabulous paramedics. That is what we did, and so they were quite envious of my being a Victorian.

Finally, can I also pay tribute to the nurses at the Albury Wodonga Regional Cancer Centre, who cared so beautifully for my father when he was a patient there and during his last hours. They were very beautiful, professional, caring women and men who cared for my father, and I am eternally grateful to them. This is a great bill. I commend it to the house, and I am sure it will have a speedy passage.

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (15:02): It is always good when you can get up and speak about bills that you have had some sort of involvement in, and at the end of January I had a few days in hospital—bit of elective surgery—just preparing me for the rigours of 2020. That was a good experience. I was so impressed—I had not been in a hospital for a long time. Seeing all the modern developments, the enthusiasm of the nurses, the highly professional approaches and so on was most impressive—well, so I thought. I do have to record, though, and this is as good a place as any, that one night I was seeking to sleep and I thought, ‘Oh, this will be a simple matter of calling the nurse for a simple sleeping tablet of some kind or other’—which I have not had for years and years. I called the nurse and I said to her, ‘Look, I can’t sleep. Could I have a tablet to help me?’, and she turned to me—a nice smile—and said, ‘Just close your eyes’. I thought, ‘Oh, okay’. So I did that, and I went off to sleep. So it shows you it is not all modern medicine there, just a bit of practical awareness and so on.

I am proud to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020, which enshrines in legislation the Andrews Labor government’s commitment, not only to Victorians having access to high-quality and safe health care, but to ensuring improved standards of care. The bill achieves this end by varying and improving the operation of nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios. As eloquently noted in the second-reading speech, the bill will deliver on our commitment to ensure safe and high-quality nursing care in our publicly funded health facilities and maternal and child health services. The bill does this, first, by recognising and improving proper minimum staffing arrangements and thereby increasing nursing and midwifery workforce numbers in Victoria’s public hospitals, and, second, by ensuring our maternal and child health nurses are optimally trained to deliver the best child, maternal and family centre practice for the community.

It is important that the background to and the need for the amendments set out in the bill are remembered. The Liberals’ callous industrial policy when last in office—that is, their endeavour to lessen the nursing and midwives staffing minima in our public hospitals and clinics—should not be forgotten. Their policies were not only misconceived and unfair but threatened to destroy the harmonious relationship which had developed within the public health system under the previous Labor government. The Liberal method adopted of endlessly delaying the negotiations for a new public health sector agreement for nurses and midwives and other ancillary staff set the sector back in time and in goodwill. Particularly obnoxious was the Liberals’ determination to reduce health standards by linking reductions to the independently established minimum staffing levels and ratios for nurses and midwives with bargaining for the appropriate wage and conditions outcome to apply in our public hospitals and clinics.

The Labor government’s determination was and remains to remove nurses’ and midwives’ working conditions and minimum staffing standards from the bargaining table, assuring patient care and improved health outcomes through staffing ratios being enshrined in legislation. The present bill continues the reforms commenced by the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015, amended and improved by this Parliament in March 2019 and now to be further strengthened following extensive consultation with stakeholders.

It is important to note the major benefits accruing within the bill result from consideration of some 80 written submissions received from wideranging industry associations, employer and employee representatives and other interested parties, particularly including executive directors of nursing and midwifery at regional and small rural hospitals and clinics. Reflecting stakeholder and community consultation through the Nurse/Midwife to Patient Ratio Improvements Taskforce, the bill delivers
sound conclusions following a genuinely consultative approach. The task force was established in 2016 to provide expert advice to the Minister for Health on improvements to ratios and to identify recommendations across a range of clinical areas and settings. The task force recommendations and information provided through such expert collaboration will continue to inform ongoing analysis and monitoring by the Department of Health and Human Services.

The bill has as a principal objective the proper application of research-based staffing minima and ratios for application within the public health sector. There can now be no doubt, having regard for the Australian and relevant overseas research findings, that there exists a correlation between nurse staffing levels and improved nursing-sensitive patient outcomes. Essentially these establish a nexus, which should not surprise, between adequate nursing levels and improved health outcomes generally. The English research examining higher nurse staffing levels reflects a reduction in adverse medical outcomes and a significant diminution in the risk of mortality.

The bill achieves these objectives by the removal or improvement of the rounding methodology which has applied to staffing ratios to ensure consistency across shifts and settings in determining workload under the safe patient care act. Also beneficial will be alterations in staffing numbers achieved in several ways. Particularly noteworthy is the provision of an in-charge nurse or midwife across a range of settings, predominantly on night shift—I did refer to that night shift at the beginning of my speech—which will reduce clinical risk, improve patient safety and better ensure patient and staff wellbeing. The in-charge nurse or midwife frees nurses and midwives from administrative duties in favour of direct care to patients. This innovation is intended to address the overnight workload seen as an area of high nursing demand and risk.

The second major advance in the bill involves the introduction of the supernumerary after-hours coordinator, which will benefit our small and regional hospitals by addressing the problem of increasing complexity in nursing coordination across the range of services in regional health services such as Alexandra District Health, the Mansfield District Hospital and the Terang and Mortlake Health Service. The after-hours coordinator in hospitals with one or two wards which operate birthing suites and/or emergency departments with more than 2500 annual presentations will facilitate effective nursing and midwife duty.

The bill also includes the reclassification of Warrnambool Base Hospital from level 3 to level 2 from 1 July 2022—a big year 2022—recognising the district growth of Warrnambool and thereby meeting the anticipated present and future demand consistent with the service plan and feasibility study undertaken in 2019.

Fundamental too are the amendments to the Child, Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 which ensure that the operator of a maternal and child health care centre or a statewide telephone service providing maternal child health advice must in engaging a nurse to provide such service ensure that the nurse possesses the prescribed specialist qualification or its equivalent under the regulations.

How appropriate is it that in the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife and also marking the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s birth such magnificent advances in support of our nurses and midwives are to be made. I join with my colleagues to acknowledge the outstanding professionalism and dedication to their work of Victoria’s nurses and midwives, which in the time of COVID-19 has highlighted their selflessness, compassion and care. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) (15:12): It is always a tough act to follow the outstanding member for Hawthorn. He has made a terrific contribution to this place since his arrival. He always speaks so eloquently and well.

I am delighted to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. This is a really important piece of legislation, and it is important because it goes back to the more efficient delivery of public services here in Victoria. I will give you an example. Back in 1999 when the Bracks government was first sworn in it was facing a situation where the health...
system had been decimated. There were about 15 hospitals that had been shut down and sold off and there had been significant cuts to the health budget in that time. In fairness I think Rob Knowles, when he came in in 1996 as the health minister, tried to undo some of that damage, but there were some real challenges there.

Why this is relevant is that you had a significant reduction in the workforce at that time. So when John Thwaites was the health minister in 1999 what he sought to do was to look at starting to increase the number of nurses. At that point in time the way in which you did that was to go through the various agencies. So you would have a shortfall in relation to a particular hospital and you would then go out and start employing agency staff. The problem that became quickly apparent to John was that the nurses themselves were not getting particularly well remunerated for their services but the agencies were making an absolute killing because they knew that effectively the government was a large purchaser of these services. They knew that the government had promised to make these sorts of investments, and the agency just said, ‘Right, well that’s fine’. The wages bill was quite significant at that time.

So it was manifestly inefficient. You saw a significant outlay of public moneys for an increase in the provision of nursing staff, but at the end of the day it was more money to the agencies and not to deal with patients. That led to the safe patient care act being passed by the Bracks government, and what that sought to do was to make sure you had a significant increase in nursing staff at that time to try to deal with what was required, to try to have that repair of the health service.

By putting nurses on contract and making sure that you had nurses gainfully employed in a full-time way, you took out the middle person. You removed the agencies from the equation, so the super profits those agencies were reaping could actually be redeployed to the employment of nurses. So effectively what you saw was an increase in nursing staff at that time and you saw a greater level of efficiency. By having this level of care and an increased level of care, then you obviously therefore improve patient outcomes.

I am reminded of a hospital in India, and I relate this from the point of view of efficiency, and I know the member for South-West Coast is laughing—

**Ms Britnell:** I am just thinking only you would know about a hospital in India.

**Mr PEARSON:** If the member will briefly indulge my brief diversion, this hospital in India—and I found this out through a discussion with a senior executive at Medibank—specialises in hip replacements. That is all they do. They only do hip replacements. Now, because they have got the size and the scale, being a country of over 1 billion people, that is what they do. So if you need a hip replacement, you go to this particular hospital. I am not quite sure which province or which city it is in, but it is the go-to place for hip replacements. Why this is relevant is when you have got a dedicated workforce totally devoted to a particular procedure, the unit cost price for that procedure is really low. So because these hip replacements are all they do over and over, again and again, the repetition of only doing one form of surgery drives down the unit cost price, and it is actually really affordable to get a hip replaced in this particular hospital in India.

**Ms Britnell** interjected.

**Mr PEARSON:** I would apply an economics framework to that, member for South-West Coast, and I would say that if you can look at trying to increase the number of procedures that you do and if you have got an open and collaborative workforce that are prepared to share, then you will start to see those efficiencies become embedded in the way in which those work practices operate and you therefore have the capacity to try and drive down those unit cost prices. For example, if you and I and the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence were all orthopaedic surgeons in this said hospital in India and if the three of us were all diligently working away and we found that you managed to do 20 procedures in a day, I have only done 10 and my good friend the minister is at 15—
Ms Britnell interjected.

Mr Pearson: Hang on, I want to make this point, and I am not suggesting it is a production line. My point is that if you do 20 procedures a day and I only do 10 and the minister does 30, then there has to be a question to say: what is happening with me; am I a laggard and are there problems with the way I work and my efficiencies? I would say to you, again in terms of statistics, I do not think you would use just one day in the life of an orthopaedic surgeon to basically rate their performance, but I think that over the passage of time as we were collaborating together in a collegiate working environment and you were clearly a positive outlier and I was a negative outlier, then questions could be asked, and you could use those greater levels of transparency in dialogue and engagement in a positive, collegiate working environment to then ascertain why you are such a positive outlier and why I might be in this particular case a negative outlier.

That is a useful exercise, and I think by having more nursing staff and by having these patient ratios in place you are looking at better patient outcomes, and if you can provide a degree of certainty to the nursing staff, then they will have a degree of confidence about their workplace. They will be able to look at investing more in their community because they know they have got that certainty of employment. I think that is a very good thing, and being able to create that right working environment where you can try and address these issues is very important.

The bill again looks at greater levels of efficiency, and the fact that we are now removing the rounding methodology across remaining shifts and settings is really important because it creates a level of consistency and certainty. Health economics—I have not really dallied in this particular field, but I understand it is quite a niche profession. Stephen Duckett, who is over at the Grattan Institute, has certainly made his name in relation to health economics, and it is a really, really complicated piece of research and work. Indeed I remember speaking with Medibank Private, and if you look at it, this is quite extraordinary: at Medibank Private 1 per cent of their policyholders are responsible for between 45 and 55 per cent of their costs every year. That is quite extraordinary if you think about it—that half your costs relate to 1 per cent of your policyholders in any given year. So when you think about that level of complexity in terms of health economics and finding ways where you can try and strip out some of that complexity and make it more simple, make it easier to understand, then there are some real benefits there. When you look at the size of the health system, when you look at the costs in relation to the funding for the Department of Health and Human Services, it is a very large number; it is a huge investment that is made. By making sure that you look at having some consistency in relation to your methodology and a greater level of certainty you can potentially achieve greater levels of efficiency and higher levels of transparency.

So it is an important bill that is before the house because it builds on Labor’s record in office across the different administrations of the 21st century. It is about—again returning to my earlier point—having a significant increase in the number of nursing staff to improve patient outcomes and providing those nurses with a degree of certainty by having them be directly employed by the hospitals as opposed to the agencies. Then you are effectively removing the middle person, you are providing a greater level of certainty for that workforce and you are making sure that the money you allocate from a payroll perspective actually goes to the nurses for that work as opposed to going to private providers who are effectively middle people taking those funds. I have no objection to those individual businesses running a business as they see fit, but you have to question the utility and the benefit in terms of public expenditure of diverting a significant amount of resources to a particular cohort of organisations when the money could be better used by employing nurses directly to improve patient outcomes. So on that brief note I commend the bill to the house.

Mr Tak (Clarinda) (15:22): I am delighted to join the honourable member for Essendon—a very interesting contribution—and other speakers before me to speak today on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. It is very appropriate that this bill is here today. Our nurses and healthcare workers have been on the front line of this pandemic, and I
would just like to take this opportunity to say thank you, each and every one of you, for the dedication, commitment and courage that you have shown each and every day.

I have also spoken this week on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Regulation of Student Accommodation) Bill 2020 and about how education is such a big part of our community. Well, so is health and so is Monash Medical Centre. Thank you to everyone at Monash Medical Centre and Monash Children’s Hospital. We are extremely lucky to have these wonderful facilities in the electorate of Clarinda. I am so proud of the amazing job that all of the healthcare workers do at these facilities each and every day.

I am also extremely proud of the investment that this government is making in these facilities and their staff. Soon we will also have Monash Heart just a bit outside my electorate—Victoria’s first standalone heart hospital. The Andrews Labor government is extremely proud to support the $564 million Victorian Heart Hospital at Monash University’s Clayton campus. The extensive work at the site continues. When it opens the hospital will have capacity for more than 200 beds, more than 2000 surgeries and more than 100 000 consultations each year.

The hospital is being delivered in partnership with Monash Health and Monash University, and I am very much looking forward to its completion. It is just one of the many projects that the Labor government is delivering. Other local investment includes $76.3 million for a new emergency department at Monash Medical Centre—simply amazing. This is happening in my electorate of Clarinda. This project will make a difference to my constituents, and it really demonstrates that this government is committed to improving the health of our state. We can see that through the investment in our healthcare system and the investment in our healthcare workforce, and we can see that commitment again in this bill here today.

The bill will ensure safe and high-quality care in a range of clinical settings through improving minimum nurse and midwife staffing ratios, which is at the core of this bill, to reflect increasing patient complexity and changing models of care. The bill will also safeguard the high quality of maternal and child health services in Victoria through protecting the minimum education requirements for maternal and child health nurses. This is another example of the Andrews Labor government delivering on its election commitments and delivering positive health outcomes for Victorians and for healthcare workers.

Two acts will be amended by this bill. The amendments to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 include extending the new rounding method to remaining wards and shifts to create consistency with the SPC act when determining staffing numbers; requiring an additional nurse or midwife to be in charge in multiple settings, predominantly on the night shift, to reduce clinical risk and better manage overnight overload; and reclassification of a hospital to better reflect anticipated practice, hospital capacity and patient complexity. That is quite an extensive list of amendments to the SPC act.

There has been extensive consultation undertaken regarding the amendments to the SPC act. Consultation occurred during bill development with the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation, the health worker unions, the Victorian Hospitals’ Industrial Association and many other relevant organisations. During that consultation the public sector executive directors of nursing and midwifery indicated support for the additional staff member on a night shift where there is an increased clinical risk linked to reduced staffing. That ongoing support will be dependent upon appropriate funding to ensure the staffing changes without negatively impacting on the budget or patient care. Relevant to this, it is important to note that the 2019–20 Victorian budget outlined $64.4 million until 2022–23 and $70 million of ongoing support to hospitals for the implementation of this bill. In addition, a $50 million Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund will build the workforce through education and training opportunities. We have already heard in contributions from previous speakers about the importance of training our nurses through the diploma of nursing. Again, this is another example of the government’s commitment to health care and healthcare services for all Victorians.
We have heard many times before that the first phase of the amendments to the SPC act was passed by this Parliament in March 2019, which represented the first time that nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios have been meaningfully reviewed since the beginning of 2000. It removed the outdated rounding methodology on most shifts so that in most circumstances nurses and midwives were no longer required to carry a workload that could be at times 50 per cent greater than the ratio set out in the act.

It also established new ratios in key clinical practice. That was backed up with the funding required to deliver 600 additional nurses and midwives employed in public hospitals across Victoria. So I am very proud to be here today to support phase 2 of the commitment and to support further improvement to see a further 500 nurses and midwives employed in our public health system, whether at Monash Health or other metropolitan hospitals or in our regional services. That is a total of 1100 extra nurses and midwives—more nurses, more midwives, better health care outcomes for all Victorians.

I would just like to share about my own family here. As a father of two young boys, Mason and Lawson, both delivered at Monash Children’s Hospital, I do not know what I would do without the wonderful support and advice of our Monash Children’s Hospital nurses in Victoria, so thank you to our healthcare workers, especially our nurses at Monash Children’s Hospital. Finally, I would like to commend the Minister for Health on this bill and on her leadership during the pandemic, which has been very important. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (15:31): I rise with pleasure to speak in support of a bill that builds on our government’s strong track record of investment in our public healthcare system. Nurses and midwives are with us for some of the most incredible movements of our lives as well as some of the most difficult. They are those intense moments of our lives that when the dust settles often transform into a blur, but what happens in those moments can be life defining.

Nothing has underscored that more than recent months in which we have seen the world surge towards 500,000 coronavirus deaths. We have seen and heard the devastating choices and the weight of responsibility that healthcare workers around the world have had to face. We have seen and heard tales of courage and compassion amidst heartbreak and loss. Here in Australia, particularly thanks to the leadership of the Premier and our chief health officer, we have avoided much of the cruelty of this virus, and I do not have any hesitation in saying that there is no place that I would rather be or would rather my family were than right here in Victoria.

But make no mistake, our ability to be nimble in this crisis is no accident. Having a world-class healthcare system is no accident. The provision of quality health care is a choice. Here in Australia and in Victoria, across our history we have had strong Labor governments that have pushed back against conservative economic policy aimed at ripping apart health funding. Instead of cutting funding, Labor has chosen Medicare, we chose to invest in hospitals, we chose to support our health workforce. When those opposite were in government they sought to systematically gouge funds from public health and waged industrial war on our nurses. We will not forget the protracted and delayed negotiations aimed at removing ratios from enterprise agreements.

And then there are the Greens. I must acknowledge the member for Brunswick’s contribution. He clearly speaks from the heart on this and from experience. It is a shame that his party do not really find this particular topic to be worthy of any real concerted interest, because health funding is complex, it does not fit neatly into a marketing campaign or a petition, it is a bit too hard and it is not that fashionable. But choices matter. And it is particularly relevant right now as we all bear witness to what could have been had Labor governments not fought the fight for health care in this nation.

I want to take a moment now to acknowledge the amazing nurses and midwives that we have here in Victoria and the many that live in my community. Nurses and midwives are absolute heroes within our community. They are with us during our most vulnerable moments, caring for us with compassion, with resilience, with dedication, with those steady hands. And it is fortuitous that this bill comes during the World Health Organization’s International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, an opportunity to
acknowledge the contributions and hard work of our nurses and midwives every day. To each and every one of you, I say thank you.

It is vital that we go beyond expressing our thanks because nurses and midwives, as heroic as they are, are ultimately only human too. They are on the front line of our healthcare system, and that front line can be confronting, it can be exhausting and at times it can be dangerous. That is why in 2015 this government enshrined nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios into law, and that is why in 2019 we passed amendments to strengthen those ratios. We removed the outdated rounding method and eased the pressure on the many nurses and midwives who had been struggling under immense workloads. This bill goes even further in our mission to improve outcomes for nurses, midwives and the patients in their care. It improves staffing ratios in residential aged care and rehabilitation wards. It provides for an additional in-charge nurse or midwife, particularly on night shifts and in surgical wards, birthing suites and postnatal wards. It allows for additional staff in smaller regional hospitals, acknowledging the increasing complexity they face in coordinating different services.

We know that nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios are critical for patient outcomes. Our nurses tell us so, our midwives tell us so and Australian and international research tells us so. Lower staff-to-patient ratios have been shown to lower mortality rates and hospital readmissions. They shorten the length of stay in hospital and improve patient and nurse satisfaction. In short, they save lives. And that is why we have made it law. With almost 5 per cent of working residents in my electorate employed in hospitals—the largest proportion of workers in any one industry—I have had many conversations with local nurses and health professionals. These are passionate people who love their job and who give their all to their job, but they have felt the burnout and they have felt the increasing workloads.

This bill will deliver another 500 nurses and midwives into the public health system on top of the 600 we have already funded, taking us to a total of 1100 extra nurses and midwives. That is hundreds of thousands of hours of increased patient care, and we are not stopping there. This bill is backed up by our $50 million Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund, which is creating training opportunities and providing scholarships for further training to help fill the new positions these changes are creating. Already attracting record numbers of applicants from across the state, the fund is also expanding nurse and midwife graduate programs. This includes a statewide enrolled nurse graduate program, which will employ over 400 nurses over the next four years, with 100 of these positions available to TAFE graduates. The diploma of nursing is one of the most popular priority courses offered under our free TAFE program, which is already helping thousands of young people get the skills they need, tuition free, to succeed in the workforce. Our graduate program means even more Victorians will be able to study a diploma of nursing and start working as soon as they graduate.

We will continue to deliver a public health system that leads the nation, and we will continue to strive for an even better system because that is what matters to Victorians. Alongside these legislative reforms we have invested an unprecedented $7 billion in health infrastructure since 2014. It is the largest building program for Victorian health in our history. Residents in the north have been pleased to see expansions underway at the Northern Hospital and the Royal Children’s Hospital and of course our plan for new mental health crisis hubs at St Vincent’s and Royal Melbourne hospitals.

I also wanted to acknowledge the changes in this bill to the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, which protects the high quality of our maternal and child health services. Our MCH nurses play such a central role in promoting the health and development of children and their families. I know that when I first had my daughter, being thrown into parenthood was an absolute whirlwind. Everything was a huge learning curve and I had a million questions. My MCH nurses were the point of call for me—checking in, giving advice, giving reassurance, pointing me in the right direction. Victoria is the only state in the country that requires MCH nurses to be triple qualified: registered as a nurse, as a midwife and to have a postgraduate MCH nursing qualification. We want to keep it this way, so this legislation preserves the requirement for high-level education for our MCH nurses.
It would be remiss of me not to mention the critical role our MCH nurses play in identifying cases of family violence. As we know, the risk to women of being attacked by a violent partner is greatly exacerbated after the birth of a child. In some cases the only appointment the woman is allowed to have alone outside of her home is the one that she has with her MCH nurse. This is a critical interface, and we cannot underestimate how important it is in our efforts to get support to women in need.

There are so many aspects of this bill that are good for Victorians, and my colleagues have canvassed a great many of them. The crux of it is very simple: when nursing and midwife staffing levels increase, the workforce is more resilient and patient outcomes are better. So for that reason I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (15:40): Thank you, Acting Speaker Bull. It is a pleasure to be speaking on this bill with some of my favourite people in the chamber—youself in that capacity; the minister at the table, the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence; and the member for Northcote, who always makes outstanding, intelligent and heartfelt contributions to bills. She is very worthy of her electorate; in fact they are lucky to have her.

Nonetheless, onto the bill. It is a pleasure to speak on this bill for a couple of reasons. It is iconically a Labor bill, as other colleagues have said. If you think about the Labor Party’s contributions to the fabric of Australian society in a whole range of areas, one of the most instrumental ones would be health care—at a national level, obviously, Medicare, and if you did not think there was enough to be done at a state level, you would be wrong. We have these conversations. We have had them before, with friends saying, ‘Oh, federal government is so, so important’. Of course the federal government is important, but there is lot for state governments to do, and we saw that with COVID-19 in terms of most of the policy decisions that impacted the country in times of crisis were ones that could only be delivered by state governments. Hence, the Prime Minister, to his credit, established a national cabinet framework.

However, with Medicare being a national policy framework for universal healthcare, there were still a lot of deliverables a state government could enact or deliver to embellish health care at a state level to make it better. That is not just on the capital front, which I will get to in terms of building first-class hospitals, but it is in the enshrining in law of nurse-to-patient ratios. Taking out the contentious enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations, as others have said, the opposition, when they were in power, had our health workforce in protracted negotiations for something which should not even be a part of an EBA discussion or negotiation. It should be above that, because it is about patient safety, as the member for Northcote just said. So we embarked on continuing the building blocks of good Labor policy in health care at a state level through capital funding, through operational funding and through legislative change, and this is the third bill in relation to this that I have spoken on in my five and a half years in this place.

It is an important bill because it combines two things that matter to us. Health matters to us—it matters to the Victorian community—and workers matter. And again, as the member for Northcote said, nurses are workers, but they are also there at the times of the greatest need for people. When we are not well or when our family member is not well that is a time of great need for us, so the last thing you want in that environment, in that context, is stressed or overstretched nursing staff. They are the start and the finish of any visit in hospital. They are the start and finish in any visit to a maternal and child health centre.

We have all shared personal stories, and I have had several visits to hospital—both for family and friends and for myself. And every possible question, from the basic questions—‘Where are the bathrooms?’; ‘Can I go to the bathroom?’ or ‘Can I have a glass of water?’—to the most complex questions about your treatment, starts and finishes with the nursing staff. They are escalated at appropriate times with doctors—doctors do an amazing job—but nurses are there from start to finish.
So this matters because they are workers. This matters because they deliver health care at the front line. And the case again, as said by colleagues, is clear in terms of why this matters. Others have referred to—and I think the member for Mildura referred to—international research. I have got some notes here which indicate international research has proven a strong correlation between patient health outcomes and nurse-to-patient ratios.

In fact recent research conducted by the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing found lower hospital patient-to-nurse ratios are associated with lower mortality, fewer readmissions, shorter length of stays, greater patient satisfaction, greater nurse job satisfaction, less burnout and greater intent to stay. What that means is you get more experienced staff staying in our hospitals, and particularly in our public health system, and a whole range of other benefits that others have mentioned in their contributions.

What we are seeking to do in this bill is several things, but I will just focus on a couple of quick ones. One is effectively removing the rounding methodology across the remaining shifts in settings that exist currently, in the way the ratios operate, to create consistency in staffing workload determinations through the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015. That will improve staffing in residential aged care and rehabilitation wards specifically. We are also seeking through this bill to embellish in-charge arrangements, so staffing numbers will increase through the provision of an in-charge nurse or midwife across a range of settings, particularly on night shift, and that is for various reasons—to reduce clinical risk—and based on research. Our smaller regional hospitals will also benefit. If this bill goes through the Parliament, we will see the benefit of having an additional after-hours coordinator, acknowledging the increased complexity of coordinating a range of services in smaller regional hospitals. There are a range of other things. I think the member for Northcote talked about enshrining in statute the qualifications of what we expect for maternal and child health nurses. We have the best in the country and want to maintain that.

Our record speaks for itself. What did Keating say? If you go to your local pet shop, the parrot will be talking about microeconomic reform. If you ask any Victorian or any Australian which party is best placed to deal with health, the answer invariably is the Labor Party for the reasons I described at the beginning of my contribution, and that investment continues heavily. In fact it not only continues under this government, it actually reaches record levels under this government, including, as outlined by previous speakers, the budget in terms of the ambulance fleet and a whole range of health services that impact our lives.

In my local patch, at Monash Medical Centre—technically in the member for Clarinda’s patch, but my community uses Monash Medical Centre and a bit of the Alfred hospital on the other side of the electorate—we have made some profound investments, not just in the emergency department and psychiatric facilities but through the fantastic Monash Children’s Hospital. I have said in this place before that it was a Bracks initiative that the former Liberal government—the one after the Bracks government—tried to descope to save some money. They tried to remove the helipad and tried to remove the emergency department from the Monash Children’s Hospital, and a range of things. We came into power—thankfully, the Andrews government—and we rescoped the project the way it should have been, the way Steve Bracks had intended. I was very proud to join the Premier, the then Minister for Health and a range of colleagues in the south-east in opening that incredible facility. The children’s hospital is a really special place. These facilities are far more sensitive, the way they are designed now, for little people, effectively to try and get young people and children to have better health outcomes through being more relaxed and more able to receive treatment and support in those more amiable settings. That is one of a number of examples in my patch.

I do want to reflect, in concluding, that for us there is always something to be done in health. I was in the chair when the member for South-West Coast was speaking. I think she was a nurse in a previous life—that is what I understood. I have profound respect for all nurses, even the ones that sit in the Liberal Party. I have profound respect for all nurses. They are incredible people, the nurses in my community and nurses across the board.
But the member talked about the fact that she never claimed overtime. She always did overtime; they all did. I think I know why she was saying it. Effectively she was saying that nurses are so committed to their work, and absolutely they are, and they will do that anyway. But I do not think we should authorise that environment. I do not think we should just accept that people do unpaid work. We need to in the system build operational capacity, as the member for Northcote said, so nurses do not feel stressed, they do not feel that if they have to leave on time the whole place is going to fall down.

And that is what this government offers. It does not rely on the goodwill alone of people. We know the goodwill exists in the health professional sector, but we do not rely on that alone, because we support our workers and we support our patients. I want to commend the Minister for Health—this one and the previous one—for the navigation of this important policy reform through the Parliament, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (15:50): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on a very important piece of legislation, the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020, and to rise from this side of the house. I have never seen the house from this view. This is a very important piece of legislation, because it is about the one thing that every government must prioritise, and that is the health of our people. It is easy for a government to build a shiny new hospital, but what we need perhaps more than the bricks and mortar are the people within the hospital. Every single one of our nurses and healthcare professionals deserves the profound respect of their political leaders, indeed of the community. I think that is what they have got from this government. We have respected their work in the way that it should be respected in no less legislation than this, which was historic in our first term and enshrined nurse-to-patient ratios in law—that is a minimum level of care in law—for the first time ever in this country. At the 2018 election we committed to strengthening that even further, and this is the second tranche of that legislation.

But what this legislation also does, what this policy also does, is ensure that we have the workforce to back in these very significant reforms. These reforms include a commitment to recruit 1100 additional nurses. We are achieving that in a variety of ways, including with the Andrews Labor government’s historic free TAFE policy. One of the free TAFE courses on that list of course is the diploma of nursing. The diploma of nursing is offered in my electorate at Holmesglen’s Moorabbin campus. Over the years that campus of Holmesglen TAFE has become something of a health precinct. They offer the diploma of nursing, they offer the bachelor of nursing; in fact they are the only TAFE institute in Australia to offer the bachelor of nursing. They even have a hospital on site, a hospital that is run by Healthscope. So at Holmesglen now you can complete a diploma of nursing for free, thanks to this government, and then you can choose to either become an enrolled nurse or you can move into the bachelor of nursing course at Holmesglen Institute. Following all of that you can actually move into the Holmesglen hospital to complete your training. The Moorabbin campus of Holmesglen TAFE has become a one-stop shop to pursue a career in nursing, and we are very proud of what is going on over there.

I have visited the nursing building at Holmesglen in Moorabbin many, many times. Most recently when I visited I met a couple of diploma of nursing students who had come to nursing a little bit later in life. But what gave them the opportunity to do that was the free TAFE policy. I met a refugee from Afghanistan, for instance, who was studying nursing at Holmesglen. I also met another student who had always wanted to study nursing but she could not afford the $13,000 that she needed to study the diploma of nursing, so this gave her that opportunity. And in giving people opportunities with the diploma of nursing, who otherwise might not have had those opportunities, we are making sure that we have the nursing workforce behind this substantial historic reform of nurse-to-patient ratios in law.

What this does is it completes the rounding methodology across remaining shifts and settings to create consistency in staffing workload determination throughout the act, which will mean improved staffing in residential aged care and rehabilitation wards. Staffing numbers will also increase through the provision of an in-charge nurse or midwife across a range of settings, particularly on night shift, to reduce clinical risk, improve patient safety and ensure patient and staff wellbeing. These arrangements will apply to medical and surgical wards, birthing suites, postnatal wards, special care nurseries,
geriatric evaluation management wards and larger emergency departments with short-stay observation units. There are many other reforms to the ratios included in this legislation.

The other significant changes in this bill are the changes to the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. This bill introduces amendments to protect the high quality of our maternal and child health service by prescribing MCH qualifications in legislation. For over 100 years MCH services have played a key role in promoting health, wellbeing, safety, learning and developmental outcomes for all children and their families. We are the only state in the country that requires MCH nurses to be triple qualified—a registered nurse, a registered midwife and a postgraduate qualification in maternal and child health nursing. And we are doing all of this because we want to keep it that way and preserve the high level of education, which has a significant focus on postnatal care for the mother as well as the child. And it is certainly in line with this government’s historical investment in the health and wellbeing of Victorians.

In my own electorate we are served well by Monash Health, and of course currently under construction is the $63.2 million expansion of the emergency department at the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton, which will include a number of things, including a much larger, cutting-edge, 24-hour emergency department with additional beds and 10 extra short-stay beds for patients requiring care for less than 24 hours, and it will include a separate area for children. Of course we have got Monash Children’s Hospital on that site, which has been an incredible addition to the health ecosystem in the area. I was also pleased in our first term with the $16 million expansion of Moorabbin Hospital in my electorate, which means that that hospital is equipped to care for 50 000 more patients a year than it was able to prior to that expansion. These are historic investments in our hospitals and in the health and wellbeing of Victorians, the likes of which this state has never seen.

It is important to contrast those investments with what happened under the previous government. I think I am somewhat well qualified to speak on those investments given the number of rallies that took place outside the Bentleigh electorate office which I now occupy when it was occupied by my predecessor, Elizabeth Miller, herself a nurse who I understand went back to nursing following her time in this place. Of course our nurses and midwives could not understand for the life of them why they were not getting this sort of support from the previous member for Bentleigh during their long and acrimonious dispute with the then Baillieu government that was only resolved in the end after a PR disaster by that government when Marshall Baillieu literally flipped the bird at protesting nurses. That was the level of disdain with which those opposite held our nurses, who truly are heroes of this state. We see that especially now with this once-in-a-century pandemic, which is still not over, which this government has responded strongly to. Part of the response—the strong response—to this pandemic by this government has been to support our frontline workers, to support our nurses. Our nurses are selfless people who give everything to their role and give everything to the health and the care of Victorians, and they have this government’s support. This government will always have their backs.

With those few words, I commend this bill to the house because it will strengthen our nurse-to-patient ratios and strengthen the health of Victorians. I wish it a speedy passage.

Ms WARD (Eltham) (16:00): I rise very happily to support this bill. It is incredibly important to support our nurses, and it has never been more so than in the climate that we find ourselves in at the moment in this pandemic. The work that our medical staff have done, especially our nurses, has been nothing short of extraordinary. In fact nurses around the world I think have just been incredible and amazing and very, very brave.

I want to acknowledge the work of the nursing staff at the Austin Hospital. My mother-in-law was recently in there for 10 days—she sadly passed away—and had extraordinary care from the nursing staff at the Austin. For a woman who had motor neurone disease for 20 years, the support she received from nursing practitioners in the Bundoora area around Heidelberg and at the Austin has been fantastic, and I am incredibly grateful to them for all of the work that they have done.
It is too easy for those opposite to not engage with this legislation, to say that we do not need to increase ratios and that we do not need to support nursing staff, but we do. We absolutely do. This is a government that is committed to ensuring that we have high-quality health care, and it is something that is a fundamental part of the Labor story, which is ensuring that there is good health care and good access for all Victorians, in fact all Australians, to health care. We are, after all, the party of Medicare.

It is important that we enshrine nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios into law and that we continue to build on the work that we did in 2015. Our commitment to nurses, just like our commitment to paramedics and to so many others, has never diminished; in fact, it has only strengthened. We know that it is important that patients have access to good nursing care. We also know that it is important that nurses have support, that nurses have got enough staff around them to give the care that we know that they want to give but also that they have got the support to continue with ongoing training, with ongoing resources and with ongoing support. We have delivered 600 additional nurses and midwives employed in public hospitals across Victoria, and we are delivering on phase 2 of our election commitment to further improvements and to see a further 500 nurses and midwives employed in the public health system, from our busiest metropolitan hospitals to our rural services, meaning that we now have got an extra 1100 midwives and nurses.

I have noticed that a number of people today have spoken about Florence Nightingale. They have spoken about the ‘Lady with the Lamp’ and the work that she did, and her great contribution to nursing. I would like to draw to the house’s attention another pioneer nurse, a nurse around the same time as Florence Nightingale. In fact, they were remote colleagues if you like; they both cared for soldiers in the Crimea. This nurse’s name was Mary Seacole, and she was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1805. I think her father was Scottish and her mother was Jamaican. While she was at that time what was regarded as ‘technically free’—she was not a slave because she was of mixed race—there were still very few civil rights for Mary and her family. They could not vote, hold public office or enter the professions. So while there are some in the United Kingdom—this will make a bit more sense further into my speech—that complain about her not being a nurse as such, the fact is that she was not actually able to get a formal qualification, if any was available, to be a nurse because she was not allowed to join the professions because of the colour of her skin.

She learned her nursing skills from her mother, who kept a boarding house in Jamaica for invalid soldiers. She liked to travel, so she was an impressive, adventurous woman. She visited Cuba, Haiti and the Bahamas, as well as Central America and also Britain. On those trips she complemented her knowledge of traditional medicine with European medical ideas. In 1850 she travelled to nurse victims of the Kingston cholera epidemic. Travelling to Panama in 1851, she found that her skills were needed once again because the town of Cruces was suffering its own outbreak of the disease. There is a Mary Seacole Trust, and it records her as saying that she saved her first cholera patient in Cruces by using mustard emetics to make the patient vomit, warm cloths to combat chills, mustard plasters on the stomach and back, and calomel, or mercury chloride, at first in large and then in gradually smaller doses. In 1853 Mary returned to Kingston, caring for victims of a yellow fever epidemic. She was invited by the medical authorities to supervise nursing services at Up-Park in Kingston, the British Army’s headquarters, and she reorganised a new Blundell Hall, her mother’s former lodging house, which was rebuilt after a fire to function as a hospital.

Mary had no children of her own, but she still had a very strong need to care, which led her, after she arrived in the UK in 1854 and learned about the Crimean War, to decide that she needed to be a part of that relief and support as well. She wanted to go to the Crimea and serve and look after wounded and fallen soldiers. She approached the war office asking to be sent as an army nurse to the Crimea, where there was known to be poor medical facilities for wounded soldiers, and she was refused. This person who had set up her own hospital was being refused permission to care of soldiers in the Crimea. So what she did is she did a bit of crowd-funding. She helped get some money together and found her way to the Crimea, and in what I would call a bit of innovation she set up a hotel, the British Hotel, and she used the profits from that hotel to care for and nurse wounded soldiers. She provided a mess
table and comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers. She also visited the battlefield, sometimes under fire, to nurse the wounded, and became known as Mother Seacole. Her reputation rivalled that of Florence Nightingale. The Times war correspondent, Sir William H Russell, wrote of Mary in 1857:

I trust that England will not forget one who nursed her sick, who sought out her wounded to aid and succour them and who performed the last offices for some of her illustrious dead.

After the war she returned to England destitute and in ill health. The press highlighted her plight and in July 1857 a benefit festival was organised to raise money for her, attracting thousands of people. Later that year Seacole published her memoirs, The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands, and I think she absolutely did have many adventures.

It is important that we recognise the achievements of all of our nurses, no matter who they are, no matter their colour. What happened to Mary Seacole is that she was forgotten for generations. Despite the fact that she was so well respected within her community, that she was well respected on her return back to the United Kingdom, she was forgotten until recently.

A statue was erected to Mary Seacole outside St Thomas’ Hospital in 2016 in central London. It was amazingly the first public statue of a named black woman in the United Kingdom, the first one—in 2016. This is a remarkable achievement by this woman, and I am grateful for the opportunity to record her story in this place. There are so many nurses whose stories do, sadly, get forgotten, and I am sorry to say that there are so many women of colour whose stories get forgotten. I do hope that we are entering into a new era where those stories do get remembered and where those stories get told and where those stories get celebrated, because there are so, so many.

Going back to the legislation before us, it is an important, fundamental part of the Labor Party that we do care for people, that we do look after people, and this legislation will ensure just that. It ensures that nurses and midwives get further support, that they continue to have access to the services and supports that they need, and that we are a government that shows that we respect the work that they do. We understand how hard that work is, and we understand how seriously and how dedicated our nurses are to their profession, how long they work, the extra mile that so many of our nurses go to to make sure that their patients are cared for.

It is absolutely paramount that they are supported. It is absolutely paramount that they are not rushed off their feet, that they are able to give their patients the care that they need and that patients are secure in the knowledge that there are enough nurses around them to look after them. As I said about my mother-in-law, who was in high care, we do need those nurses at hand, and I thank them for it.

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (16:10): I am pleased to rise this afternoon and make a brief contribution in relation to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. As we have heard from a number of members on both sides of the house during the course of this debate, there are very few of us, if any, in this place that have not had some sort of an interaction with nurses over the years. It really is a very special profession, there is no doubt about that. I think, as I said, we have got all kinds of stories.

I suppose from my perspective I can think back with my own wife, who was a nurse when we were first engaged many, many years ago. She came up through the old system working at Epworth hospital in Richmond where the nurses quarters were on site. That was a rather different situation to what we typically see these days, but it was an interesting way that it was done. You can make the arguments for and against that method, but certainly from her point of view she was on site and spent her hours working on the wards and training, doing her theory as well as her prac, on an ongoing basis. So that was a very interesting time.

I can particularly remember she did a placement—back in those days, as I recall, Epworth did not have an emergency ward or section, so she did her emergency work at St Vincent’s. I remember one night I picked her up after she had been working there doing a late shift, and she had had a most interesting
situation because a prisoner had come in from one of the prisons—I think it was probably Pentridge back in those days—and she was tasked with doing his obs and dealing with the medical side of his admission. That was quite an interesting experience for her given that she had not encountered that sort of patient before. Of course you treat every patient equally—that was not the issue—but I suppose it was the entourage that came with him that was different and the fact that he was handcuffed to the bed. That was also different to most of her patients. Like all nurses she had many, many stories of various exploits and various interesting things that she had to deal with during the course of her training.

Lo and behold, one of our daughters also went on to become a nurse. She studied hard and did that, but she did not actually practise as a nurse for long either. She went on and did some other things, and that is fine. But as I said before, it often attracts people with very compassionate hearts and people that are really fine to serve their community in that way. I think too of one of my brothers-in-law, who is up in country Victoria. He was a nurse, and he worked particularly hard and became a specialist in the cardiac area. He was up in Bendigo and worked up there. He went on with his studies to such an extent that he became a PhD doctor, so he was a nurse but he was a doctor, and now he is a professor. He has done extremely well off the back of his nursing training that he has worked at so diligently over many, many years.

I notice in here clause 13 deals with the birthing suites, and that is something I have certainly had some experience with firsthand, having had four children, and I tell you what—

Ms Green interjected.

Mr ANGUS: That’s right. Thank you very much, member for Yan Yean. There is no doubt that by the time you get into the hospital, particularly with your first but certainly with the subsequent ones, you are very, very keen to see the nurses and the doctors when you have got your wife having some contractions. I remember with one of our girls, who arrived very quickly and has not slowed down since, we were hurtling in there, we got in there and she was not really going to wait. So we were in the lift going up, and she was ready to arrive. As a result of that the doctor that we normally had in place, Dr Barham, was not able to be there. I thought, ‘Okay, we’ll see how this goes. I’m sure it will all be okay’. And lo and behold, the midwife was a man. So that was the first time with all our children that we had a male midwife. He was a consummate professional. He did an outstanding job and delivered our third child with absolutely no problems. The doctor came in subsequent to that and all was well. As I said, you are very, very glad to see those medical experts, the nurses and doctors and others, when you are in that sort of a situation. There is no doubt that we are all very grateful for that.

I think too of our three grandchildren that have all been born at the Angliss Hospital out at Ferntree Gully. Again that is a very busy hospital. Some members might have seen recently that there were some statistics in the paper in relation to the influx of births out in the east of Melbourne for whatever reason. It cited the Angliss amongst those hospitals, so there are babies being born out there on a continual basis. Certainly from our point of view they looked after our daughters well and our grandchildren as well. There are many different locations that I am sure we could all talk about that are doing a great job.

Our children were all born at the Mercy maternity hospital at East Melbourne, which is no longer a maternity hospital. I remember we were fortunate at the time to have some private health insurance. It was back in the old days, in the 1980s. My wife went up to I think it was the ninth floor there, and to this day I still think it is probably one of the best views in Melbourne as you look back across Treasury Gardens towards the city from the top of what was the Mercy maternity and is now a multimillion-dollar apartment complex. They were the days when the ladies had six or seven days in there, probably a week or so, and it was all very good and quite a contrast to these days, particularly in the current environment where you are raced in and out very, very quickly. We were very grateful for that and continue to be so.
My son’s partner is a nurse. She is in the emergency area of one of the major hospitals here in Melbourne. She does not talk too much about her work, but she tells us a few stories. It is just incredible the way they attend to people. She is in the emergency area. They do not know when the chopper lands or when the ambulance backs up what the real extent of someone’s injuries are, and to be able to take charge, the doctors and nurses, to assess the needs of the patient and then to deal with those needs is quite extraordinary. I absolutely take my hat off to all the medical staff, not the least of which are the nurses that get in there and do the necessary work to preserve life at all costs. I congratulate her and I congratulate all those nurses who work under such incredible pressure. You have got to be a very special kind of person to be able to do that and to maintain your composure, to understand what you need to do and to manage the very, very complex situations that often come through those swinging doors.

On the other side of the coin, I have had my father in hospital in the last couple of months. He was in there for two weeks. It is a very different environment at the moment with the COVID situation. I remember taking him down—he went to St Vincent’s Hospital, who looked after him extremely well. The nurses again there were outstanding and provided great care. But it was very confronting to go into the casualty section down there, just over the road here, and to basically be stopped. I was with my mother. She and Dad were able to go in; I was not able to. Everyone has their temperature taken, and they are all in gowns. It looked like something out of a movie. But again despite that, and despite the very difficult circumstances that all medical personnel are currently working under given the COVID-19 situation, they did a professional job and a great job. We cannot forget, I do not think, or we should not underestimate the very real challenges that they face in having to deal with people when we have got this extremely contagious infectious disease out there in the broader community.

In conclusion, can I put on record my gratitude to the medical staff and particularly in the light of this bill the nurses that work diligently 24 hours a day looking after all of us in our hour of need and serving our community in such a splendid way.

Ms HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (16:20): I rise to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020 that is before the house, and it is an absolute pleasure to do so. I note that this bill builds upon the work that was done in setting nurse-to-patient ratios back in 2015. I was proud to stand in this house and speak on those ratios then, as I am today. This bill will amend two different acts, the first being the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 and the second one being the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. Really at the core of the amendments in this bill that is before us today is ensuring high-quality care by inserting minimum nursing and midwifery staffing ratios to reflect the increased needs and demands of patients and, secondly, safeguarding the high quality of maternal and child health with minimum education requirements now being put in place for our maternal and child health nursing staff across the state.

There have been a number of speakers on this bill. Many speakers have made the point on this side of the house that there has never been a government more committed to nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios than this government, the Andrews government. The work that we have done to continue to build upon that in our last two election commitments was to not only put the legislation in place but also to put the additional nursing staff in place. There was a commitment made of 600 additional nurses and midwives to be employed across public hospitals in Victoria when we first made our commitments around ratios in 2015. Then of course a further commitment was made before the last election to ensure that we take that total to 1100 extra nurses and midwives across the state.

This bill also looks at expanding the existing registered nurse and midwifery graduate course. For the first time, as I mentioned, there will be minimum standards but also a statewide enrolled nurse graduate program, which in itself will employ 400 enrolled nurses over the next four years, with 100 of these positions being available to TAFE graduates. I note that the diploma of nursing in the TAFE sector is one of the most popular TAFE courses being offered as part of this government’s commitment to free TAFE courses.
I wanted to take the opportunity to speak on this bill and in the debate talk about my own Florence Nightingale that I raised, my stepdaughter Maddy, who is a nurse. Of course like most nurses she married a nurse as well. I have heard their stories of both training and practice at the hospitals that they have worked in. Maddy has worked in neonatal intensive care units (NICU), in rehab units and most recently in the children’s unit. Ben has worked predominately in emergency and emergency surgery as a nurse and is doing further training now to become more qualified as a surgery nurse.

Both of them have shared very horrific stories with me over their years as nurses of the things that they have had to see, of the lives that they have seen lost, of the hands that they have had to hold of people that are passing away and children that are passing away and of assisting parents who have lost their newborn babies and their children after the loss. I think it is this insight as someone who is a mother to a nurse, and I know that it is very hard not to take these things home. In fact I think I was the first one after she lost her very first patient that she called in tears, and we talked it through and worked it through. I have got to say she has gotten much tougher in her years of being a nurse.

She and her husband, Ben, welcomed their first children 10 months ago. Unfortunately their little twin sons, Theodore and Frederick, were born 10 weeks early and it was a very touch-and-go time for their health. I just want to pay tribute to the amazing NICU nurses that cared for those babies around the clock. One of the babies in particular, little Freddie, had a very severe problem with his breathing and a lung infection, which made things very touch and go for him for a number of weeks. But they have both pulled through. For anyone that follows my Facebook page, they will see those little chubby fat cheeks on my Facebook on a regular basis, with teeth breaking through now. I think you need to pay tribute to the amazing nursing staff that were giving that care around the clock to give those two little boys lives.

I have also had firsthand experience of witnessing the great work done by cancer treatment nurses. They are phenomenal people, particularly the ones that I got to know very closely at the Epworth hospital in the cancer care unit there. Those nurses are phenomenal. Not only are they dealing with radioactive treatment every single day and potentially putting their own health and safety at risk, although there is a lot of mitigation there and a lot of personal protective equipment, but the reality is that they are still handling that material every day and putting it into patients. They do it with a smile on their face and they do it with tremendous compassion. They find out what their patients’ interests are, because quite frankly those patients are going to sit there for hours having their chemo treatment or going through radiation. And these nurses do it week in, week out, year in, year out, and they continue to do it with a massive smile on their face. They bring great humour and they bring great compassion, and I want to thank the nurses who do that amazing work and all the nurses across the state who do a fantastic job in whatever care they deliver.

I just wanted to touch on why it is that ratios matter and why it is that we want to protect them as a government. Research by the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research and the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing has found that lower hospital patient-nurse ratios are associated with the following very negative outcomes. Basically, if you have very understaffed hospitals, you have higher mortality rates, you have higher readmissions, you have longer stays and you have less patient satisfaction. Of course you have less work satisfaction for the nursing staff there. So by investing in our nurse-to-patient ratios, ensuring that the staffing levels are correct, not only are we providing a safer place and better outcomes for our patients, but we are also doing more to invest in the careers and the longevity of our nurses.

The presence of adequate numbers of nursing staff also reduces the risks of patients developing things like pressure ulcers, pneumonia, deep vein thrombosis, ulcer, upper gastric bleeds, sepsis and cardiac arrests. And for anyone who has had surgery themselves, when you are recovering from surgery quite often the bossiest nurse on the ward will come in and make you get up after surgery. No matter how bad that surgery has been, no matter how dramatic it has been, they make you get up and they make you walk around. And the reason they do that is so that you do not get any fluid settling in your lungs. I have met some very tough cookies on nursing wards who are very good at getting their patients out
of bed, getting them walking around, despite their pain and grogginess. But they are doing it for their own good, for the health of their patients. There are so many nurses out there that have to put up with a lot of terse words from their patients, but I want to say thank you on behalf of our Parliament for the quality of care that they deliver and the thanks that they absolutely deserve from us.

So in concluding, can I just say that nurses and midwives are the backbone of our health system, and in 2020 we celebrate the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife of course. The bill acknowledges the significant contributions these professionals make to the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. It also presents us with an opportunity to say thank you, and we will forever remember this year as one where nurses and midwives demonstrated extraordinary commitment to their care, to our care and to their compassion and capability during the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected so many of us. Victoria has one of the best public health systems, and the amendments in this bill will stand forever as a part of a long commitment to our nurses.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (16:30): It is a great privilege for me to follow my great friend the member for Sydenham in speaking on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. I am just such a big admirer of hers. She is a fighter and has been through a lot in recent years, and I am pleased to see that her career has taken a turn for the best today. I know that some of the difficulties for her have been way too close an experience with the health system, with the loss of her fabulous husband and life partner, Steve Hutchins. We remember him very well, Natalie.

I have just come back to speak on this bill. The whip was kind enough to give me a little bit of time out to go and visit my son at St Vincent’s Hospital because he has been in there for two weeks with acute back pain—extreme pain. It is really hard as a parent to watch that. I went to visit him between 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm, but because of COVID there are very, very strict visiting requirements at the moment. It made me really think about how our nursing workforce have to face up to dealing with the pandemic that every human being is having to deal with. But our nursing workforce and our medical workforce have not only had to do the extra training, provide the additional support to patients and undertake the extra infection controls, they are also dealing with their own fears and the fears of their family in working in such an environment. But they have continued to do the job that they can do.

I was disappointed in not being able to see Blake between 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm today. He is now allowed to have two visitors for 6 hours out of every 24. That is only from the start of this week. Last week it was only 4 hours of every 24, and that was two visitors. That puts an extra stress on our nursing workforce and everyone in the medical workforce, because it means that they have got to fill the gap of the loved ones in reassuring their patients. I just wanted to say from the bottom of my heart to every one of our nurses across the state: thank you for the work that you have always done, but particularly during this pandemic.

It is not the only hospital I have been in in the last two weeks because, as many of my colleagues who know me well would know, my husband, Michael McDonald, had had 436 skin cancers removed as of two weeks ago.

A member interjected.

Ms GREEN: Up to 436—yes, the patchwork man. He does have skin left. One of the reasons why he does is because of the great post-operative and wound care that he has had from nurses time and time again at the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre and also from the district nurses that come and do wound care at home afterwards. He has had two lots of surgery during the COVID-19 time. He has had less time actually in the hospital, to protect everyone that is there. I am just so impressed. Any of you who are worried about your loved ones going into hospital at the moment, do not have any added worry, because our medical workforce have stepped up to the plate. They are doing absolutely everything they can. From the security guard to Anne at the desk at St Vincent’s Hospital, everyone is stepping up to make sure that everyone is safe and doing things in very, very different ways.
When I heard the member for Mildura speak—I think it was yesterday—it made me think about the times that my mother, and other members of my family, spent in the Mildura Base Hospital. I have heard the member for Mildura. We all know that was her platform on getting in—to ensure that that disgracefully privatised hospital was returned to the public sector. I want to commend the Premier and Jenny Mikakos in the other place, the Minister for Health, for their diligence in returning that hospital to the public system.

But I heard the member for Mildura talking about what the impact of that has been like for the nurses at that public hospital. A hospital is never just bricks and mortar, and I think that is why the member for Mildura is here. I often hear members of the National Party talking about their health services and their hospitals, but it is usually more about bricks and mortar and what is needed. It is never really about fairness to the workforce.

I have been so proud to be part of a government that—from my first term in 2002 and preceding that—introduced nurse-to-patient ratios as part of industrial agreements. Various health ministers, including the Premier, were overseeing that, but we saw how that could be unravelled and undone during the time of conservative governments. We were elected on saying that we were going to enshrine nurse-to-patient ratios in legislation, and we have done that. We have done stage 1, and we are going to the next stage.

There are also some additional changes in relation to some of our country hospitals with these nurse-to-patient ratios, including reclassifying the Warrnambool Base Hospital—where my mother was born and a number of my aunts and lots of my friends—from a level 3 hospital to a level 2 hospital in 2022–23 to better reflect anticipated practice, hospital capability and patient complexity. They are having enormous demand and part of that is the growth of people wanting to live in regional areas, and so we have got to make sure that those health services keep up with that and have a similar service to what people would expect in metropolitan services. I am also really pleased to see the reclassification of some of the tier 4 hospitals to tier 3, and this includes such services as Terang, Mortlake and Kyneton, which is actually not far from my electorate. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria, I understand how important these health services are.

There are also some changes in the bill around maternal and child health nurses, and I did just want to thank the two that were very important in my life as a young mum and in the lives of my children. The first one is Jeanette Nagorcka. Any of the public servants and members of Parliament dealing with the northern region of education would know Jeanette Nagorcka as the regional director. I first met Jeanette Nagorcka when she was my maternal and child health nurse in Warrnambool with my son Blake, who I mentioned earlier in this speech, so I did want to acknowledge Jeanette.

I wanted to say thank you so much to Sue Walsh, who was my maternal and child health nurse in Northcote around the time that I gave birth to my son Carlo. I had worked in and was interested in the field of ethnic affairs, and I just learned so much from her. She went to the next level trying to ensure that she gave great care to people of all backgrounds, mums of different backgrounds, and would see them in groups rather than as individuals. That was their culture, and I particularly remember how she was involved with the Khmer refugee mums in the area. So thanks, Sue; thank you so much.

I also want to thank Selina Sutherland, who I have talked about in this place before. Selina was posthumously added to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women for her service to children in Victoria. My office used to be the girls dormitory of the Sutherland Homes for Children. Selina was a nurse, Scottish born, who always stood up to authority and stood up to children and gave them a good life in the Sutherland Homes at a time when, about 100 years ago, the community did not really take care of children the way that they should have. And so I want to say thank you, Selina; you are just an absolute legend.

But it is not about just honouring nurses and saying thank you; you have actually got to back them up with decent pay and decent conditions and make sure that they have got the ability to do their jobs. I
really hope that what the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has exposed are the poor caring arrangements where they do not have proper patient ratios. I would hope an outcome of that royal commission would be that the federal government would follow our government’s lead—the Andrews Labor government’s lead—and enshrine nurse-to-patient ratios in aged care. Patients deserve it at every age. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (16:40): It is with great pleasure that I rise today to make a contribution to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020, and of course like any bill that is debated in this place it is important, but perhaps this week there is nothing more important than the steps we are making in this legislation to empower our nurses and midwives and make sure they are backed in every single step of the way. No significant piece of health legislation comes through this place without the significant work of the Minister for Health, who has done a great deal of work, as well as all of her staff. I thank them for the fantastic work they have put in, but I think the big thanks in this instance, as we know, goes to the nurses and midwives of this world.

I think there is no doubt that we are all extremely appreciative of our nurses, who are obviously emergency services workers. They are there when we need them most. They are there in our time of need. I know nurses by and large are regarded with a great deal of respect, and they have earned every single ounce of that. We certainly have an even greater deal of respect for our nurses and midwives in Victoria—they have navigated us through the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we have been very fortunate through the actions of Victorians and through the decisive actions that the Andrews Labor government has taken to steer Victoria through what has been an unprecedented global pandemic, our nurses have played a significant role in that as well. They have gotten us through in large part through the fantastic work and commitment that they make each and every day in the state of Victoria.

I will just state as well on the record some of the experiences that I have had even firsthand with nurses. As a young 20-year-old I remember being scared to death going under a general anaesthetic at a hospital in Melbourne. I have lost the name of it now, but if it were not for the care and compassion shown to me by the wonderful nurses before I was put under and after the procedure as well, it would have been a much more significant procedure and perception, and the reality is it would have been a lot harder to get through it.

It is not just me personally but my mother as well. She ended up receiving a brain injury. She received fantastic care in the days where we did not think she would live, initially. It would be about eight or nine years ago now, and the nurses were amazing, the doctors equally so. They did an amazing job keeping us informed, and they no doubt saved my mother’s life. She was not supposed to make it through in those initial stages at Monash hospital, and even after that in the rehabilitation at the Kingston rehabilitation centre the nurses there were absolutely second to none. So any appreciation they have received from politicians, for what it is worth, in this place and importantly from community members out on main street in Victoria, they deserve each and every ounce of it, and they deserve governments that are going to back them in.

They deserve governments that are going to back them in, that are going to pay them properly, that are going to staff the hospitals properly and that are going to look after them each and every day as they look after us each and every day. This bill is not going to do all of the work. The Andrews Labor government has done a lot of work—it is now in its second term—and this bill is one more step in the right direction, and no doubt there will be more work to do with our nurses, with our midwives, with our stakeholders, whether it be the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation or otherwise, but we have come a long way and this bill today will enshrine a significant piece of work into legislation that will show this government’s continued commitment to nurses in the state of Victoria.

We know that this bill will ensure safe and high-quality care in a range of clinical settings through improving minimum nursing and midwifery staffing ratios to reflect increasing patient complexity and changing models of care, and it will safeguard the high quality of maternal and child health services
in Victoria through protecting minimum education requirements of maternal and child health nurses—and what a fantastic job our maternal and child health nurses do!

I am the first to admit in this place, as a 28 year old, I really did not know what a maternal and child health nurse did before I was elected to local government back in 2016. And I am now very proud and grateful for the learnings and education that I have been through as a young fellow and a local councillor and now in a government that backs in our maternal and child health nurses, because what a fantastic job they have done. I have learned just how important the blue book is. Is it the blue book?

Ms Hutchins: Yep!

Mr TAYLOR: The blue book. Thank you, member for Sydenham. And congratulations to the member for Sydenham as well—a fantastic contribution the respected and honourable member has made on this bill as well in this place today.

Locally as well—importantly, continuing to back in nurses—a fantastic community hospital had its 80th birthday earlier this year, I believe: the Angliss Hospital. You can speak to anyone in the Bayswater electorate—indeed in the Deputy Premier’s electorate of Monbulk—and they will tell you the great care, love and devotion that nurses in the Angliss have shown for 80-plus years now and will show another 80 further. This government’s commitment is not just through this legislation to the Angliss Hospital, a great community hospital, but also in the $4.6 million of planning money which will help kickstart the expansion of the Angliss Hospital. This will result in close to an extra 30 beds and will really go to upgrading a tired and weary part of the Angliss Hospital to make sure that they can continue to keep delivering the fantastic care that they do.

Part of that suite of commitments that the government has made to local health care, which absolutely will further empower and employ more local nurses, is the fully public Wantirna Health aged-care facility we are building out in my patch on the corner of Boronia Road and Mountain Highway in Wantirna—$81.6 million. The Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, I know, is very proud of this commitment. This is another one of the Andrews government’s commitments to health care not just in Victoria but locally in my patch, making sure people can age in place and making sure they get the care and attention that they deserve in their later years. As well at that site we have nurses who work in rehabilitation and end-of-life care, and I have been there a number of times, including with the Premier, to talk about our commitment to health at the Wantirna site, and I know the amount of care and attention that does go into end-of-life stages. Listening to those nurses there is just amazing, and we are so lucky and privileged to have them working in our healthcare system; they are extremely representative of the wider nursing community.

Of course we know as well that obviously we have not always had a government that has backed in our nurses. We know that those opposite cannot be trusted on health. We know that their modus operandi is to cut and slash and burn. Even locally there was a grand plan back in the day; the former Kennett government wanted to get rid of local hospitals in my part of the world. To think that the outer eastern suburbs would be without a Wantirna Health precinct and would potentially be without an Angliss Hospital, members of my community were in uproar then, and they rightfully should be so now. I can tell them now that this government is backing in local health care, and we are passing pieces of legislation that go to the very core of respecting our healthcare system, understanding we are a growing state.

We are going to need to build more hospitals, and we are doing that. We are doing that in Footscray, we are doing that in Frankston and we are building aged-care facilities in Wantirna to respect our senior community. We are upgrading the Angliss, and importantly as well we are looking at all life stages. We are building emergency departments for families and children to make sure that they get the care and attention that they need. Locally, Maroondah received a share of planning money in the last budget to build an emergency department so families and children can have that separation from the craziness that can be an emergency department. I know working as a police officer, I would walk
into an ED and you would see families there next to some of the other cases, and it would be extremely hard for families and young children to cope in those environments. That is exactly why this government committed to delivering new children’s emergency departments, and really this is all about our continued commitment to and investment in health care in Victoria.

Can I just say once again a massive thank you locally to our amazing nurses, our midwives and our maternal and child health nurses. You do an amazing job. You get out there each and every day while some of us have been lucky to work from home. You have put yourself in harm’s way. Thank you so much for the work that you do for our community.

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke—Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Youth, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (16:50): It is a great pleasure to rise today to speak on the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2020. It is even more of a pleasure to do so this year, given that 2020 is the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, coinciding with the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, one of the founders of modern nursing.

The importance of this bill to the Andrews Labor government has been clear from the number of contributors and the depth of the contributions of the many who have contributed on this important bill. I have really enjoyed listening to those contributions over the course of the debate, and I have been really impressed with the many stories that have been shared about the experiences of workers in the healthcare sector and of course the personal experiences of contributors in the healthcare sector.

We have no doubt all had experiences as patients in health care or with family members in health care. The member for Sunbury was encouraging me to talk about the personal experiences that I have had, but we decided that with only a 10-minute contribution I probably should not start doing that, because I am someone who has been rather prone to injuries from a young age. The most recent one is only just healing from a few weeks ago. We probably should not start going through that list of hospital visits. In the overwhelming number of cases where I have had a hospital visit, for me it has always been a time of what is normal anxiety, just like anyone that goes for a hospital visit, but it is always made better through the wonderful care of nurses that are there, who always go above and beyond to make sure that as a patient I am put at ease, that I am made comfortable, that I feel safe and that I am getting the best care that I possibly can get and that they can give.

As most parents will know, when you attend hospital with your child you see this wonderful care kick up a level. That is so greatly appreciated, because as a parent when you take a child to hospital you feel a sense of helplessness that you cannot personally take away that sense of fear that you know your child feels in this strange world. But it is very reassuring to know that there are nurses there, and it truly demonstrates what wonderful people our nurses are that they have that ability to make scared, confused children feel at ease in what is that unfamiliar environment and to do so with such compassion whilst at the same time keeping that keen eye on so many vitally important health factors. It is a skill that should not be underestimated.

I was reflecting that there is yet another cohort of nurses that take it up to even another level. My goddaughter Mia was born three years ago at 29 weeks and spent seven weeks at Monash Children’s Hospital and Casey Hospital. She was a tiny little dot of a thing who could just sit in my hand. She spent 24 hours a day in the care of others. The nurses that look after those premature babies whose lives at any time are at such risk are absolute miracle workers, and we are in their debt. They are absolutely amazing people. Our nurses and our midwives are indeed very special people. Those who have gone through the most anxious time of childbirth will all say that midwives are people that will forever hold a very special place in your heart. It is something that you really want to erase from your memory as quickly as you can, but midwives certainly hold a very special place. Midwives and nurses are very special indeed and they are with us for some of the most difficult and special moments in our lives, and I, along with everyone in this place, thank them for that.
This government is committed to ensuring that Victorians have access to high-quality and safe health care, and there has never been a government in Victoria more committed to nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios than the Andrews Labor government. Enshrining nurse- and midwife-to-patient staffing ratios into law in 2015 is a proud achievement of our government and one that we are deeply committed to. Evidence demonstrates that higher staffing numbers lead not only to a more engaged workforce but also better patient care and outcomes.

We took to the 2018 election further commitments to protect and strengthen ratios in two stages. The first phase of amendments to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 were passed by this Parliament in March 2019. These amendments represented the first time that nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios had been meaningfully reviewed since their beginning in 2000. They removed the outdated rounding methodology on most shifts so that in most circumstances nurses and midwives were no longer required to carry a workload that at times could be 50 per cent greater than the ratios set out in the act. It also established new ratios in key clinical practice areas. It was backed up with the funding required to deliver 600 additional nurses and midwives employed in public hospitals across Victoria. The introduction of this bill today delivers on phase 2 of our election commitment and delivers further improvements to see a further 500 nurses and midwives employed in our public health system from our busiest metropolitan hospitals to our rural services, taking this to a total of 1100 extra nurses and midwives.

We have invested $50 million to create a Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund that is already attracting record numbers of applications across the state. This fund is creating training opportunities and has provided scholarships for nurses and midwives to further specialise so they can fill new positions that will be created. It is expanding the existing registered nurse and midwife graduate program and for the first time has established a statewide enrolled nurse graduate program. This will employ 400 enrolled nurses over the next four years, with 100 of these positions available to TAFE graduates.

The diploma of nursing is one of the most popular priority TAFE courses being offered as part of our government’s free TAFE initiative. It means more Victorians will be able to study a diploma of nursing for free at TAFE and then start working as enrolled nurses as soon as they graduate. The fund is also providing up to 400 postgraduate scholarships for current nurses and midwives to upgrade their skills and 400 places in programs such as the postgraduate midwifery employment program. It will also provide refresher programs for 800 nurses and midwives currently registered but not practising so they can re-enter the workforce.

I would just like to, in closing, thank all of those involved in this bill, particularly the Minister for Health and all the staff that have been involved. I would also like to note the great work that the Minister for Health has done all throughout the COVID crisis.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dimopoulos): Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 2, line 16, omit “Sections” and insert “Part 1 and sections”.
2. Clause 2, line 23, after “other than” insert “Part 1 and”. 
BILLS

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Motion agreed to.
Read third time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dimopoulos): The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM AMENDMENT (REGULATION OF STUDENT ACCOMMODATION) BILL 2020

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr MERLINO:

That this bill be now read a second time.
Motion agreed to.
Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.
Read third time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dimopoulos): The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DRUG COURT AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2020

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms HENNESSY:

That this bill be now read a second time.
Motion agreed to.
Read second time.

Third reading

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 2, line 24, omit “17 March” and insert “26 April”.
2. Clause 25, line 8, omit “or” and insert “and”.
3. Clause 26, line 28, omit “or” and insert “and”.
4. Clause 28, line 20, omit “and (4)(b)”.
5. Clause 28, after line 23 insert—
   ‘(3) For section 18ZP(4)(b) of the Sentencing Act 1991 substitute—
   “(b) the informant, the police prosecutor, or the prosecution (as the case requires); and”.’.
6. Clause 54, line 3, omit “17 March” and insert “26 April”.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.
Read third time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dimopoulos): The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.
Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Mr CARROLL: I move:

That the sitting be continued.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:02): I move:

That the consideration of government business, orders of the day 4 to 6, and general business, notices of motion 1 to 44 inclusive, be postponed until later this day.

I thank the members that are present on all sides, including members of the Greens party, members on my side as well as the clerks for allowing and participating in a sitting where we would normally be going home at 5.00 pm after the adjournment. Particularly for regional members, I acknowledge the Leader of the National Party in this regard and other regional members on our side of the house that do live some distance away. This is important legislation. We could go through it, particularly the Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Worker Harm) Bill 2020, so on this side it is much appreciated.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (17:03): I move:

That this house recognises the rollout of the Andrews Labor government’s landmark reforms that will see $5 billion invested over the next decade to deliver a full 15 hours of three-year-old kinder.

I thank the house for the opportunity to speak on this motion. It feels like it was a lifetime ago when I gave that notice back on 29 October 2019. Obviously a lot has happened since then. It is an absolute privilege to be able to speak on the rollout of three-year-old kinder across Victoria. As members know, I feel very strongly about early education, about learning, about lifelong learning and obviously about three-year-old subsidised kinder across Victoria.

Given that we have just come through this public health crisis, I think it is incumbent on me to actually acknowledge some pretty extraordinary professionals who have worked so hard to support some of our youngest and littlest Victorians through this pandemic, and of course they are those early education teachers and educators who have continued to operate over the past three to four months, who have continued to run their services in all of our communities and who have provided invaluable support to so many children and so many families in our communities, whether that was in services that were operating at the time or indeed services that were operating through a home learning environment.

Those educators have been absolutely extraordinary, and not only have they provided all that incredible support to our families and communities but of course they have allowed our essential workers to continue to go to work and to provide the goods and services that we have needed throughout the pandemic as well. So, again, I am extremely grateful to those professionals—our early educators, our teachers—who have operated throughout this time.

Before, I guess, I launch into the reforms that we have already started to implement and introduce this year, I thought it would be worthwhile just taking a step back and talking about what is kindergarten and the role of kindergarten, and why it is so incredibly important to all Victorians. I know, for many of us, we understand what kindergarten is. We certainly know the term ‘kindergarten’. But I think there is a bit of a misconception out there about kindergarten and what a kindergarten program is. We all know the traditional kindergarten, the building that sits alone in the suburb that is known as the sessional
kindergarten. Those are the traditional kindergartens, which have run our four-year-old kindergarten program, and typically that runs over 15 hours a week. But of course kindergarten—a kindergarten learning program—can also be run in different settings, and that might include long day care. What that means is that children who attend long day care are also enjoying the benefit of, and participating in, a funded four-year-old kindergarten program, which is 15 hours of a structured learning program that is provided to those children in the year before they start school. For many years the four-year-old program has been a funded kindergarten program. Typically parents might pay maybe 30 per cent of the fees, but for many parents, for many families, of course there are no fees at all.

What we are doing as part of this historic reform is we are adding to that. We are adding an extra year of early learning before school so that children will have the benefit of participating in two years of play-based learning before they even reach school. Why is this significant? Well, we know, the experts tell us, that in fact probably one of the most impactful reforms you can make in the education setting is in early childhood education. If we can strip away those barriers and enable more children to participate in not just one year of early learning before school but two years of early learning, then the benefits are simply immeasurable. We know—the experts tell us, the research tells us—that teachers and others can actually pick those children in primary school and beyond. They can pick those children who have participated in a kindergarten program, and that is pretty compelling. If a barrier to children participating in one of those programs is cost, then I think it is incumbent upon us as government, as members of Parliament, as parliamentarians, to do what we can to eliminate that barrier and to provide equity and equality of access to those programs.

That really is the nub of the historic reform that we are introducing. As it says in the papers, this reform is indeed historic—$5 billion invested over the next decade to deliver a full 15 hours of funded, subsidised three-year-old kinder across Victoria.

Proudly, Victoria is leading the nation in this reform. It is profound, it is historic and it is the largest single investment we have ever made in early childhood education in our history. As Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education it is my absolute privilege that I get out there to support the rollout. I get out there to meet with an awful lot of three-year-old kindergarten students and four-year-old kindergarten students and also the families, but importantly I also get to speak with many, many of the early childhood education teachers and educators. I think what is important about that is that I am able to acknowledge the commitment and the contribution they make in quite literally changing the lives of some of our littlest Victorians.

It is compelling to listen to their stories. It is compelling to listen to their commitment to these littlest Victorians and their drive to help them to be educated, to support them to learn and to assist them in what is going to be that really important transition into primary school, because I think if we get that right then we are setting up our youngest Victorians in the best possible way. We are giving them the best possible start in life, and frankly as a member in this place that is pretty profound and it is a pretty extraordinary and humbling legacy that we are able to deliver in Victoria.

I also want to acknowledge of course our Premier and also our Deputy Premier, the Minister for Education—they have been, obviously, extremely supportive of this reform, have seen it for the extraordinary value that it presents and have been just incredible advocates for some of our youngest Victorians—but also acknowledge the incredibly hard work of our educators and teachers as well.

So the rollout of three-year-old kinder is an absolute game changer for us here in Victoria, and I know, having spoken with many of the peak bodies, industry leaders and a lot of the childcare operators, that the other states and territories are looking to us as leaders. I know they would love to see this reform in their states as well. All I can say is I hope that one day that happens, and how good it would be to see this rolled out nationally. It would be a pretty extraordinary thing.

Mr Edbrooke: Absolutely. You would be jealous, though, wouldn’t you?
Ms KILKENNY: That is right, yes. So as I have said, we have already embarked on this historic rollout, this massive reform. It was this year that we commenced the rollout of funded three-year-old kinder. It has started in six local government areas (LGAs) where three-year-old children can access up to 15 hours of funded kinder per week. These areas are Buloke, Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians, South Gippsland, Strathbogie and Yarriambiack. I have visited five of the local government areas, and I have done repeat visits on a number of occasions. Getting out there, meeting with the service providers, meeting with the families and just seeing three-year-old kinder in action has been quite an extraordinary thing to view. Next year, in 2021, families in a further 15 local government areas will also have access to a full 15 hours of funded kinder each week, and I will go through these LGAs. They are Alpine, Ararat, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Colac Otway, Corangamite, East Gippsland, Glenelg, Hepburn, Indigo, Loddon, Murrindindi, Southern Grampians, Towong and West Wimmera.

It is also worth noting that it is the regions that are actually leading us out in this reform, and that is pretty telling as well because, one, I think it is going to make a significant difference there, but it is also important because those first rollout areas were selected because they have the capacity at the moment to be able to offer those programs, whether that is through current infrastructure capacity or with teachers and educators. But I have to say when I have been visiting these regions and meeting with the people running the programs, meeting with the families, there is a real sense of pride that they are leading the nation out, and they are very conscious that the rest of the nation is watching them. Eyes are on them because we all want this to succeed. Everyone wants to see the rollout of three-year-old kinder succeed because it is so meaningful, and as I said it is going to have an incredible impact on education and on those communities in particular.

As I said, this year the rollout commenced in six LGAs. From next year it will be a further 21 LGAs, and then in 2022 we will have three-year-olds across the state being able to access kindergarten. That will include all of our metropolitan kinders, including the Acting Speaker’s electorate down in Frankston and of course down in Carrum as well, and I know that service providers down there are just delighted to be able to be part of this reform. They cannot wait for it to happen. In fact I know that they would love to have seen this rollout earlier in their particular areas, but we need to get this right, and it is important that we learn each year as we roll out how to better improve the rollout, how to make sure that we have got the correct capacity to be able to accommodate all these new three-year-olds who will be starting their journey a year earlier. Of course what is really important is making sure that we have got the workforce as well, because when we roll this out we are going to be looking for an additional 6000 teachers and educators. It is an extraordinary number, an absolutely extraordinary number. So it is important that as we roll it out we are getting those teachers, those educators, online to be able to move into those services and to meet this demand from, as I said, the additional 90 000 three-year-olds who also will be participating in three-year-old kinder by the time this is fully implemented in 2029.

Now, why is this important? Well, we know, and certainly the experts tell us, that 90 per cent of a child’s brain development happens before they are five, and that is just an extraordinary thing to comprehend, but it goes to show just how important those early years are. If we are able to provide this early education two years before school, then the impact is so significant, and as I have said, that impacts carries through. It is not just then the transition to school; it is beyond. As I said, primary teachers are able to identify which children have participated in a kinder program and which children have not, and we are talking about quality kinder programs as well. So these are structured learning programs for three- and four-year-olds.

The research tells us that these children typically present better cognitive and better social skills when they start school. There is evidence to suggest that these children actually have better exam results when they are 15, 16, 17, better social and emotional outcomes when they are 16 and also, interestingly, are more likely to go on to higher study, and these are significant social and economic benefits.

I think if you are to put it in crude economic terms, there is evidence to say that for every dollar invested in a child’s early education Australia receives back at least $2 over that child’s life. So whichever way
you look at it, this is a game changer. It is a winner. But as I said, when we look at four-year-old kinder—remember, kindergarten is not compulsory. It is not like school; children do not have to go to kinder. I want to see 100 per cent of children going to kinder, and that is going to be part of my work over the next couple of years, but it is not compulsory.

What is interesting is that for four-year-old kinder we are looking at a benchmark of around about 96 per cent participation or attendance rates. We are sitting at roughly 96 per cent. So for a funded kindergarten program, we have 96 per cent participation amongst four-year-olds across Victoria. When you then look at three-year-old kinder, which typically for most people has been unfunded—parents have had to cover the full cost, which can be anything up to $5000—the participation and attendance rate obviously drops quite significantly. For example, in South Gippsland last year their participation rate for unfunded three-year-old kinder was roughly 30 per cent. South Gippsland was one of the first local government areas in which we rolled out three-year-old kindergarten this year, and the stats this year bring it up to almost 90 per cent. All we have done is remove that barrier—cost being that number one barrier—and we have seen an absolute leap in enrolments from 30 per cent to just over, I think it was, 80 per cent in South Gippsland in just one year. We obviously expect those numbers to increase again as more people become aware of the kindergarten program, as we get out there, as we communicate it and as we talk about the benefits. I would encourage everyone in this house in their electorates to talk about the benefits of early education and just why it is so crucial—absolutely crucial—that we encourage all of our families in our communities to enrol their children in a funded kindergarten program.

When we roll out the three-year-old funded kindergarten program, as I said, the cost will not be, as it is now, roughly $5000. It will reduce significantly. Many families—around one-quarter of Victorian families—will pay nothing at all, and then for families on a higher income the Victorian government, the Andrews Labor government, will cover roughly two-thirds of their kinder costs, and that is consistent with the funding currently for four-year-old kinder. Families will be looking at a saving of about $3500 per year. That is going to eliminate one of the most significant barriers to three-year-old kinder, and this is about then giving our youngest Victorians the very best start in life. As I said, it will extend to not just the sessional kindergarten that we are all familiar with but it will also extend to kindergarten provided by long day care centres across Victoria.

In coming back to the early childhood educators and teachers, these people are quite literally changing lives. They have the power to influence, to shape these children, and I have to say, of all the people I get to meet, they are inspiring. It is quite amazing to watch, and I have had the opportunity to attend some of their workshops and to meet them at university campuses.

I think also with the Acting Speaker we went and met the first cohort of students at Chisholm TAFE who were undertaking their free diplomas this year. That was the first cohort going through, and just the enthusiasm amongst that group of people—I think for many of them they would not have been able to embark on this study if it had not been for free TAFE. So that is a really important initiative that is packaged up with this reform as well because, as I said, 6000 more teachers and educators over the next 10 years is an enormous amount of people that we will be looking to employ in this sector, and obviously one way to support that workforce development is by offering free TAFE, which started this year.

The educators, our early childhood education teachers, are going to be the backbone of this reform. What we are also doing to support teachers and educators in early childhood education is we are offering scholarships, so up to $34 000 towards a degree qualification so that educators can upskill and those teachers can then be lead teachers in those kindergarten programs. We have got on offer up to $24 000 for postgraduate and masters qualifications, and so far we have supported nearly 1 think 1000 scholarship recipients. It is quite an extraordinary number already. I have been able to meet with a number of those recipients, again people who perhaps would not have sought to upskill, would not have embarked on further study if it were not for, one, this reform that we are implementing and, two, the very significant support from these scholarships that are on offer.
Another really important part of this package is obviously making sure that in those regions where we are rolling out three-year-old funded kindergarten first we have got the workforce needed to be able to roll it out. The Andrews Labor government has been offering incentives to encourage teachers and educators to move to the regions. So for anyone out there, if you are thinking about a career change or if there are people in your communities who might be thinking about a career change, can I strongly recommend either the free TAFE, the certificate or diploma in early childhood education, or if they have already got qualifications in teaching and are thinking about upskilling, to get a postgraduate qualification and think about relocating to a region. If you are looking for a career where you can have an incredible impact on the lives of many young people and can contribute to their love of lifelong learning, then it is a pretty good career to consider, and a pretty certain career too, can I say. This reform over 10 years is setting up a lot of children and a lot of families for an extraordinary life of education.

The more that we invest in early childhood education—and we are talking about quality early childhood education, which is led by, as I said, qualified early childhood education teachers—the better the results for those children throughout school. Frankly we want to see the best start in life for these children, for our littlest Victorians. We want to see them get the support they need, the encouragement they need, to be able to live lives of learning—to play, to grow, to thrive—and then obviously to have that really important transition into school. As I have said, two years of play-based learning is going to provide incredible benefits to the child but also bring enormous benefits across all of our communities.

If I can just perhaps reflect on a visit—I might have already mentioned this one—I made to Yarriambiack shire earlier this year. It was a town called Minyip. I was not aware but apparently Minyip is where they filmed The Flying Doctors; it was Coopers Crossing or Fosters Crossing or something. But anyway, I visited the town of Minyip, and it was their first day of three-year-old kinder. I went into the kindergarten and all the kids were there and they had their gorgeous little shirts on and were all matching. They were so cool, calm and collected. It was quite extraordinary. It was all the adults in the room—the teachers and I think the mayor were there and there were businesspeople from the town—everyone else more nervous than these three-year-olds, who just took everything in their stride. I remember having a chat to them, saying, ‘What is it that you are looking to get out of your first year of three-year-old kinder?’, and it was to be able to be with their friends and to be with their new teacher, who they had all absolutely fallen in love with already. She just exuded this incredible enthusiasm but also discipline. She was very good with that and had the kids doing everything they needed to do on this first day of kinder.

But what was really good also about visiting Minyip was that the lead teacher—her name is Christiana Henke—used to be a primary school teacher and had taught there since 2011. It was only because she started working as a relief teacher at Minyip Kindergarten that all of a sudden she decided she had a real passion for this and she felt she could be quite useful in this role. She applied for and was actually one of the recipients of our scholarships for postgraduate qualifications in early childhood education. With her scholarship she is now completing a graduate diploma in early childhood education through Victoria University. She will now become the director of that kindergarten and a teacher at Minyip kinder. This is someone who has actually been out there working as a primary school teacher, had grown up in the area but had moved away and has now not only rediscovered her love for the region but discovered her new love for this new career. Everything seemed to work very well, and there she was back acting as lead teacher at the gorgeous Minyip kinder. The other really interesting thing about Yarriambiack is that its participation rate is now 90 per cent for three-year-old kinder, which is absolutely extraordinary for their first year.

We are delivering the biggest reform in the history of our state’s early childhood education with three-year-old kinder for every Victorian child. This massive investment of $5 billion over 10 years is historic and something of which we should all be very proud. I could keep talking for another half an hour I reckon, but I absolutely commend this investment. I am very proud to be part of it as well.
Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (17:33): The member for Carrum said that she could talk for another half-hour on this topic, and sincerely I could listen to her for another half-hour on this topic because she is so passionate and has really put her heart in this area of public policy which is just so important. You can just tell that it is not just a job for her; it is something that she absolutely believes in.

I want to pick up where she left off in that she mentioned Yarriambiack. One of the privileges I have in this Parliament, and the one before, is being the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria, and I have been able to work closely with our regional partnerships. The first regional partnership forum that I ever went to was the Wimmera Southern Mallee. The Wimmera Southern Mallee, of which Yarriambiack is a part, is an area of the state that has its great things going for it, but it has some challenges because it is the one region in our state that has a declining population. There are other areas of the state that either might be stagnant or are just growing a little bit compared to the rapid growth in areas that I represent in the outer north, the outer west and the outer south-east.

So I think my perception when I was going there was that I love the area; I love going to Horsham. I opened a swimming pool upgrade there recently. The first swimming carnival I ever swam in as an amateur as a kid was at Horsham. I was going to this regional partnership, and I thought about how they have got the oldest population profile in Victoria, and the background is that a lot of their young people move away. But the young people that were there were the most dynamic young people and had the greatest amount of hope for improving their region.

There have been many projects that the nine regional partnerships have come up with, but I really want to commend the Wimmera Southern Mallee early years project, giving kids in our region the best start. I cannot say—I was not inside the policy engine room that came up with the extension of universal three-year-old kinder—but I like to think that the then minister, Minister Mikakos, and the Premier were absolutely captured by the possibilities of this project, which had come out of the Wimmera Southern Mallee, for how you could improve the whole-of-life opportunities for children and young people.

The Premier announced the funding support for the initiative at the 2017 assembly, and it really came out of that partnership—working with schools, working with early childhood. They have now got a partnership with the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services with support from the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, who have all been working collaboratively to bring this initiative to life. I think what the member for Carrum was just talking about with the work of the teachers in Minyip and Yarriambiack just shows what possibilities can occur.

Steve Bracks always used to say that we have to govern for the whole of the state. There is that old saying that you are only as strong as your weakest link. We said, ‘Okay, with the rollout of this policy, let’s go to where the greatest level of disadvantage is, where the average age of the population is the oldest in the state, where the outcomes for children in the various learning and developmental domains actually need improvement’, which had been identified by the regional partnership. To begin there, I am so proud of that.

There are no members of the National Party in here at the moment, and this is no disrespect to them—I like having a bit of a set-to with them. But they are often saying that we as a government—and I think it is a political mantra—do not pay as much attention to regional Victoria as we do to the city. Nothing could be further from the truth. When you look at this initiative and the fact that it is being rolled out in the most disadvantaged parts of the state, we are not merely going, ‘Well, where’s our heartland? Where are we going to roll it out?’’. We are doing it where it is needed, and that is a measure of good government and making the most difference where you can and where you should.

Three-year-old kinder has already begun, providing access to up to 15 hours of kindergarten in Buloke, Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians and Yarriambiack plus two other areas of the state in South Gippsland in the Gippsland Region and Strathbogie, which is actually only just a little bit to the north of my area and is in the Goulburn region. In 2021—so that is next year—I am really pleased to see that Strathbogie’s neighbour, Murrindindi, will also have the rollout.
I saw so much after Black Saturday how much children were impacted by trauma. There was a lot of research prior to then but there has also been since. I know with primary school teachers and secondary school teachers that most people do not realise that in the Kilmore East fire area footprint—the five local government areas that were impacted by the Kilmore East fire on Black Saturday—there are more children enrolled in early learning, primary and secondary schools that are from fire-affected families now than there were 11 years ago, at the time of those fires. And education professionals will tell you that the children with the greatest challenges and mental health and learning difficulties are those that were actually in utero at the time of the fires. That means that they are grade 5 and grade 6 right now. I think that is just an absolute evidence base to prove that that trauma can have a huge impact, even if it is before a child is born.

I have been reading quite a bit of literature about what the impact of COVID-19 has been, and we have got all of our families doing an amazing job of distance learning. We talk about who our first responders are and, Acting Speaker Edbrooke, I know that that is what you did as a job. Everyone knows that a firefighter is a first responder and is an essential worker, but one of the many things that we are learning through COVID-19 is that there are many other essential workers. We are learning that our early learning professionals are absolutely essential workers to keep supporting our children through difficult times, that learning does not begin at five—it begins before that—and in particular in difficult times you actually need to provide that additional support for families.

The support services that we are doing for mums and babies, in addition to Tweddle and the Queen Elizabeth Centre—and we are building one of those in Whittlesea and, I think, six across the state—really are indicative that we actually care a lot about those kids. I wanted to commend a couple of education professionals. Former principal, retired, Daryl Furze worked with me in getting the Ness Reserve pack-up kindergarten relocated to Diamond Creek Primary School. Well done, Daryl.

Mr CARROLL. (Niddrie—Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:43): It is my pleasure to rise and speak on the motion moved by the member for Carrum. Can I at the outset say I think the member for Carrum’s knowledge on the subject matter and background in this are so important, as was the member for Yan Yean’s contribution, particularly from a regional perspective. I know—and the shadow minister is at the table, too; we know—the importance of early childhood development and the importance of the first 1000 days of a person’s life. And it is why all the research comes out—whether it be from Tweddle, whether it be the Armytage-Ogloff review into youth justice, whether it be from the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, the Royal Children’s Hospital or whether it be from UNICEF, we know the impact of family life, education, speech development and socialisation. The more that that can occur particularly up to the age of eight—international research shows that if you were to do one policy reform right here, right now, to improve education outcomes, it would be that you roll out three-year-old kinder. It has the weight of international research behind it, whether it be Canada, the United States or Europe.

And this is a signature policy of the Andrews Labor government. The Deputy Premier has overseen an incredible transformation in this state in building the Education State. But when you think about it, we often in youth justice talk about wrapping services from cradle to college—it really does begin with three-year-old kinder. But more than that, as the member for Yan Yean spoke about, we do know that people from vulnerable communities in particular can be developmentally vulnerable. If you can
change the life trajectory of someone—Michelle Obama always used to speak about living a life of purpose. A book I read recently was by a gentleman called Geoffrey Canada, and the title was *Fist Stick Knife Gun*. Geoffrey Canada actually founded the Harlem Children’s Zone in New York. It was all about placed-based, targeted investment, particularly in the early years, and cradle-to-college education. That really does begin in the family home. But, more than that, it is about the community, it is about the education institutions, and it is really bringing those two things together.

I am very pleased to support the motion moved by the member for Carrum. I think the other aspect I would add to this is: it not only has benefits for the young person, the child, and their family, but there is an economic benefit too. In fact there is a cost-benefit ratio of four to one—that is, every dollar invested in three-year-old kindergarten and universal kinder returns about $4 to the community. From a taxpayer point of view, if you think about giving everyone the best start in life—the Premier spoke about incarceration rates and the cost of that. He may have mentioned it being about $250 000 or $300 000. It is about $220 000. It does continue to increase. This really does make a big difference. In the youth justice system it is higher. So we have to do everything we can do to support some of the most vulnerable communities that we have. If you think of the work of the Ombudsman, through her reporting, or the work of Jesuit Social Services, particularly the late Tony Vinson—if he were alive today, he would say, ‘Pick a vulnerable community and invest in it’. He would be advocating for investing in education and three-year-old kinder to really change the life trajectory of that young person.

So I am very proud to be part of a government that is making this investment. I think it is the signature social policy and reform that will show why the government is the most progressive government in the nation. But more than that, we can have the words, we can have the policy, but you have got to back it up with the funding. To be investing $5 billion into this initiative and if you think back to that cost-benefit ratio of returning $4 to the community for every dollar invested, it not only makes social policy sense but it also makes economic sense.

I spoke about the international research, but equally it is about making sure that this is delivered. But also, as the member for Yan Yean and the member for Carrum highlighted, there is something unique in that we are focusing on this in the regions to begin with. Essentially it will be as much an economic and social policy as a regional policy. If we are to ensure as a government that we leave no-one behind, it is critically important that we deliver this but also that we ensure that the full rollout, which will begin by 2029, will be across all of Victoria. Potentially around 90 000 children could benefit from this reform each year. The scale of this reform cannot be underestimated—$5 billion, beginning with $881.6 million to deliver two years of quality, subsidised kinder to all Victorian three-year-old children.

With a three-year-old at home myself, Speaker, who you have had the pleasure of meeting, I have a personal conflict of interest, I could say, in this reform. I am looking forward, when it is rolled out in Moonee Valley eventually, to taking it up. In fact my daughter might even go to the kindergarten that I went to, St Andrews in Aberfeldie, or the Airport West Kindergarten. We will wait for that to be decided.

But this is an important reform. I could not be more proud as the Minister for Youth Justice and also the Minister for Crime Prevention to see this sort of landmark investment take place. To think that in the future Victoria could be held up with other places across the US and Europe as a place that is rolling it out is critically important because we also know about the brain science. I was reflecting with a colleague the other day on my 25-year anniversary of finishing year 12, and there is no doubt there are people that I went to school with in year 12 about whom I always wondered where they were going to end up in life, and to see the crystal-clear maturity that comes about through becoming older, having different responsibilities in life—a job, employment, a mortgage, a family, whatever it may be—there is no doubt that if you give everyone the opportunity to succeed, you can do that. That is why this reform is so critically important.

If I could in my last remaining minutes, I want to congratulate the Deputy Premier and also his departments, his public servants. To get a reform of this size up and for it also to be an Australian first—
it is not like you can just pick this off the shelf from any other state—Victoria is doing it right, we are doing it first and it will be Victoria that will be the beneficiary of it, because we know investment in human capital is arguably our greatest resource. If you are born today, your life expectancy is so much longer, and we are seeing more and more people live to 100. We are also seeing more and more people have so many different career paths and uncertainty in their time, but I know myself that I almost look at my daughter with a bit of envy. She has been born today and she will have opportunities. To be part of a government that is delivering these opportunities that she does not know about yet but will one day be able to reflect on I hope in a positive light means a lot to me as a minister in the Andrews government, but more than that, just being a member of this government that is so committed to doing everything it can to give young people, vulnerable people, the very best start in life.

On that note, can I again thank members of the Parliament in these unique circumstances that we are sitting back later tonight, but can I say we could not be talking about and discussing a more important reform into the evening on a Thursday night than three-year-old kinder. I thank the member for Carrum for moving this most important motion, and it has been an honour and a privilege to make a contribution.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (17:53): It is a great pleasure to speak on this bill for many reasons, but, as the Minister for Corrections just said, the mover of this motion is an outstanding member of this government, someone who lives and breathes her values. When you meet the member for Carrum, within 5 minutes you know what she stands for. She has taken her portfolio of Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education really like a bull by the horns and she has done extraordinary work.

I think this is an excellent motion for various reasons. One is the mover is excellent, but we are in a bit of a bubble sometimes in this place and a lot of what we do here does not necessarily translate into the daily lives or the consciousness of people, as much as we try. If I said to a group of 10 people in the electorate of Oakleigh, ‘Do you know that we have a policy that will effectively lead to universal three-year-old kindergarten access?’ I hazard to say, optimistically, half of those people would know. I suppose the other side of that is that when they go to enrol or when they have got grandchildren or they have got children themselves, they will find out because the system will hopefully tell them.

But this motion is important to raise the profile of this signature policy, because it is so profoundly important. I do not have children, and I will not have children. But it is just as important to me as any other Victorian, and it is for the reasons that the Minister for Corrections talked about. If you want a better society, a more prosperous society and a society where you do not have to walk past disadvantage as often or you do not have to walk past injustice as often, you have to start really, really early. Our commitment to early childhood education is an example of exactly that. We do not just focus on schools, we focus on the full spectrum of the education system from early childhood right through to the TAFE sector, and with the COVID-19 stimulus we are actually focused on the university sector as well.

The member for Carrum in her contribution to the motion talked about the development of the brain and the impact that you have when you invest at that early childhood level. I remember heading to Hughesdale kinder, one of my favourite kinders—I have many favourite kinders but Hughesdale kinder is one of my favourites because I grew up in Hughesdale. It is a community-run kindergarten, so it is run by mums and dads, parents whose children are there. In fact, some parents have stayed on well beyond their children being there. They put in an enormous amount of effort and work. They invite me to their AGM, their annual general meeting. Now, I do not think this is news to anybody, but I think if you were to rate any AGM out of 10 for excitement, with 10 being ecstatic excitement and 1 being boredom, an AGM would normally rank about 2 or 3. That was the view I had about the Hughesdale kinder AGM when I was first invited. I have gone back every year since because it was extraordinary. The first year I went to the Hughesdale kinder AGM there were 90 parents. I did not count them, but there were a good number and close to 100 people—extraordinary. They had me, they had the federal member and they had the local mayor, and they had aspirations. They realise the
importance of that level of education for their children, and I recognise it for Victorians and human beings even without having children.

When I was heading to the second AGM, it was after we had announced the universal three-year-old kinder, an extraordinary investment over 10 years then, so from 2019 to 2029. I rang the member for Carrum and I asked her for any insights that she had as the parliamentary secretary. I remember she and in fact the Minister for Education’s office were both very helpful. They told me incredible things, and they are incredible—absolutely profound. Ninety per cent of a child’s brain development happens before the age of five. I mean, if you think about that for a moment, that is extraordinary, because not just that child but we all—the Victorian community—have to live with that brain for the next 80 or 90 years. As the Minister for Corrections said, that has huge impacts later in life.

The member for Carrum also told me in that conversation that studies overseas have shown that access to three-year-old kinder not only affects brain development clearly but it affects life chances, it affects the jobs that those kids will get in their 20s and it will affect the level of income they earn. Who would have thought that a policy initiative of a generation ago would affect the future generation in such a profound way? We look for ways to fix social problems now and in the current time, and they are very difficult to fix, as the Minister for Corrections would know. You can put a whole bunch of interventions in place, but you would probably have to magnify those by five to get to a situation that you would have, had made that investment 20 years earlier and were not having to deal with the problem. It is incredible the Minister for Corrections spoke on this motion, because 20 or 30 years from now it will affect his portfolio. I was really inspired by those statistics and those insights, so I went into that Hughesdale kinder AGM with extra vigour. I told them my view of the work they do and that as a volunteer kindergarten committee at least it is extraordinary.

This motion is a very, very important motion to raise the profile of what is effectively, as the minister said, a signature policy of this government, probably the biggest social policy reform in Victoria’s history but also in this government’s history. And I am talking high-level policy reforms on mental health and family violence. This is extraordinary.

It is also extraordinary because it I think demonstrates faith in a long-term vision. A lot of commentary about politics from Victorians—and I do not blame them—is about short-termism. Whether it be the Suburban Rail Loop, whether it be the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System and the implementation of its recommendations when they come, or the family violence reform recommendations when they come or a whole range of other projects, we have such a long-term vision for Victoria. And the Premier, whether it be on the SRL or others, has talked about his fondness, effectively, for oak tree projects, where the person who plants the seed of the oak tree will not be there to enjoy its shade. If that is not a demonstration of the genuine commitment by this government and this group of individuals that form this government to a long-term vision for a community, for a Victoria that we will not benefit from directly politically, then I do not know what it is. We should be so profoundly proud for a moment of our vision, because it is not about votes. It is not about short-term political advantage; it is about transforming society.

I look forward to a time when I meet someone in their 20s or 30s who says, ‘Were you in the Andrews Labor government?’ and I would say proudly, ‘Yes’. They would say, ‘I went to three-year-old kinder, and had it not been for that intervention, my parents would not have been able to afford to get me into that’. We are talking about vulnerable Victorians that will benefit the most—all Victorians, but vulnerable Victorians—and in fact for the most vulnerable, including Indigenous communities and healthcare card holders and others, it will be absolutely free. This is extraordinary commitment and extraordinary vision, and I am really extraordinarily proud of my friend—and I have mentioned that before here—Jenny Mikakos in the other place, whose vision it was. And she put it up a few times. It is a very expensive project, and she put it up a few times and finally got approval for it. Never is it one person that owns something, but as much as it can be one person that owns something, Jenny Mikakos owns this—as of course does the Premier. I am extraordinarily proud of her commitment and vision.
There will be thousands and thousands of families in the future of this state’s progress that will owe three-year-old kinder to Jenny Mikakos and to the Premier.

Of course there are a whole range of other benefits—economic benefits, job opportunities and training opportunities for early education workers. We are going to build or alter over 1000 kinders in Victoria. Oakleigh and Hughesdale kinders, Carnegie kinder and a few others in my electorate will also be beneficiaries of that investment. But this is a vitally important motion because it reminds us of the imperatives of long-term visions and of the imperatives of being bold with social policy achievements and going that extra step so that we have a better society at the end of it. I commend the motion to the house.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (18:03): There is a bit of a buzz in the air at the moment because there is so much excitement about this motion. When you are talking about something as transformative as a $5 billion investment into landmark reforms such as three-year-old kinder, you are talking about something that might be at the top of the list of things that in the next few decades change this state. I sit here, and this government has got custodianship of a lot of projects that are those oak tree-style projects that the member for Oakleigh was talking about. We have got carriage of those; they are on their way. We will be the custodians now, but we will not be in government when they come through, and that is fantastic, because we are not talking about three- and four-year terms and trying to stay here without any legacy, which has been done before. But for me and many people on this side of the house, we know the effect this will have for many, many people—in some fairly challenging circumstances too.

I have got a little bit of an investment in this. I have got three children, but I am a former teacher. I have got to say to the member for Oakleigh: one day I will invite you to come down to Frankston and do something we call chop and chat. Have you heard of that?

Mr Dimopoulos: No.

Mr EDBROOKE: You might not have heard of it.

A member interjected.

Mr EDBROOKE: That is harsh. I was asking the Chair whether he had heard of that. So chop and chat—it was one of my favourite things. I was probably one of the only dads to do it when my children were in kinder, but you would do kinder duty and chop and chat was just cutting up some fruit and talking to kids. It is a bit of fun, but for the kids it is all about development. But you come away inspired, and for me—at the time I was a firefighter—it was a great balance. You would do this serious job, and then you are talking to these kids. It was a great reset. And some of the things they came out with were just amazing. I think you would really, really enjoy it. So between the member for Carrum and me, I think we can get you down to Frankston or Carrum to one of these kinders and you can do some chop and chat. I think you would really love it, and the kids would love it too.

We have heard all the data this afternoon, especially that figure that 90 per cent of a kid’s brain development happens in the first year. There will be people listening saying, ‘Oh, yeah, it’s data, it’s statistics, it’s this, that and the other; who can prove it?’ When I was teaching, I actually taught a child who did not have the opportunity to be loved, cuddled and held. I had learned all this from university, but this child had that many issues it was not funny. I believe that young adult is now doing very well, but as far as cognitive skills, social skills, motor skills, fine motor skills, communication skills, socialisation—these things are already happening at that time, and if we do not actually take advantage of that we are losing that time. We are losing that time, and the stats say that quite clearly.

The funny thing about this is why it has not been done before. I stand here and I am very proud that we are going to leave a legacy as the first state in Australia to do this, but it is one of those things that, in thinking about it, does seem very obvious; why aren’t we taking advantage of this, because whether it is children being more ready for school and able to cope with school, whether it is getting better
marks, whether it is better social adjustment, whether it is being able to be community-oriented adults who are productive, it speaks for itself. We have heard all the cost-benefit ratios—for every dollar spent it is $2 or in the justice system $4—but I would encourage everyone to listen to the member for Carrum, the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education, because she is very passionate about this and she is happy to answer any questions.

But get along to your local kinders and actually talk to them about this, because they are super excited. Who does not remember their kinder teacher? I have got really, really fond memories of my kinder teacher. She told me off a couple of times. I was a little ratbag. But I remember her really well, and I think she caught me when I ran away a couple of times too.

Ms Horne interjected.

Mr EDBROOKE: Perhaps.

Ms Horne interjected.

Mr EDBROOKE: No. But we are talking about creating 6000 jobs over a decade as well—6000 jobs. For those people who know Frankston, you know we have got the Chisholm project there. We have funded stage 1, which is actually being built. Stage 2, another $60-odd million, is going under construction soon. That is the flagship of the south-east for education. But many of the people on the peninsula—at Cranbourne, Frankston and north of Frankston on the peninsula—will be getting their education to be early childhood educators at TAFE, and that is something I am immensely proud of. That is Chisholm TAFE in Frankston.

Indeed, the member for Carrum, the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education, and I did visit the TAFE to see the first cohort of students completing their early childhood course. It was quite inspiring, quite amazing, to see the passion that these people displayed. There were children in the room, there is child care and whatnot put on by Chisholm, but the passion that they are going to take into that industry is going to pay dividends for us as a community.

I love the quote from Nelson Mandela, ‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world’. I think this is us putting that into motion. We know that countries, indeed nations, in northern Europe have had better outcomes, whether we are talking about children or adults, because of this early intervention.

The other thing about it is, and I say this from lived experience, being able to diagnose learning difficulties or other issues with children as early as possible means that we can get onto them and treat them and solve them, if we can, as early as possible. That makes a huge difference, whether it is autism, whether it is speech, hearing or sight problems or whether it is learning difficulties. Being able to jump on top of those issues and manage them makes things so much easier for the children, but it makes things so much easier for parents as well.

I am very proud that we are actually leading the nation with this. As the member for Carrum said, people are looking at Victoria. I would say from what I have heard that people are jealous. There are people that are jealous that they have not got this in their state.

The Frankston North education project is probably where we will see a lot of this rollout and make the most change in Frankston, a cohort or a community that at one stage was number four in the dropping-off-the-edge list nationally. No-one was proud of that, but at the same time no-one really did anything about it. So with more than $30 million invested by this government into the Frankston North education project we will see some great outcomes.

Again it is a generational change. It is cultural change as well. It will not be in the next couple of years, but already we are seeing small signs of that change. Mahogany Rise Primary School and Aldercourt Primary School are at the moment building their early learning centres (ELCs), so for the first time ever in that area there is this buzz where people are actually excited because they can see new things
in their community. Their kids are going to not the same old tired school that their grandparents went to, with the same old portables. They are going to new exciting infrastructure with new exciting programs. It is an exciting time. These ELCs will open fairly soon, and we will see new cohorts of children that probably would not have engaged with kinder coming in because of that as well. It is a great program, and I am proud that we have led that in Frankston.

As I said, as a former teacher I know you spend a lot of time in classrooms, not so much in kinder. I must say too that it is worth thanking all the educators in Victoria for what they have done during this COVID crisis, because it has taken some fluidity, it has taken some effort to adapt and change, and they have done it so well. You do not hear too many complaints. All I heard in Frankston was, ‘Hey, we’ve got this problem. We know how to solve it. Can you help us?’ It was quite amazing.

But I do know from my perspective that my three children were probably wanting to get back to school desperately. Living with an assistant principal and a former teacher, they were probably wanting to get back to school straightaway. But I know from personal experience that their time at kinder was crucial on so many levels, not just educational. Those formative months meant so much and put them on the right track, even in a social sense. They can learn to share, they can negotiate, they can compromise with children. They learn manners, they learn to treat people as they want to be treated. We are going to see a huge culture change to the positive with that too, so I commend this motion.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) (18:13): I am delighted to support the member for Carrum’s motion. The funding of three-year-old kinder will make a profound difference to millions of Victorians, particularly those Victorians who come from a disadvantaged background or who come from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. The reality is that people who have got money, people who really value education and value the importance of education will find a way to ensure that their child experiences three-year-old kinder as a lead-in to four-year-old kinder. But for so many members of our community if you come from a non-English-speaking background, if you come from a background of trauma or from a country where there were no schools and you cannot read and write in your own language, it is very difficult to grasp the notion that you should find a way to find the funds to put your child through three-year-old kinder.

That is particularly compounded if you have got very large families. Many African families who have emigrated to Australia have come from a hostile environment. They have come from decades of warfare, decades of trauma. In the case of many Somali families, for example, four children in a Somali family is a small family. It is more likely six to eight. South Sudanese families can sometimes have 10 children, so if you are driving a taxi, you live in public housing, you have got six children or you have got 10 children, the idea of being able to come up with hundreds of dollars every year to support the education of every single one of your children is a very, very challenging proposition. Even if you recognise it is the right thing to do, even if you have the desire and the wish to do this, it is very challenging.

The other thing, though, and what will be really interesting about this investment is the fact that it will help the state increase the access to data for young people. I will explain this in a moment, but all of us have seen the COVID graphs and the notion of exponential growth. The way our minds think, our minds tend to think in a more linear fashion. So it is difficult to understand what exponential growth looks like, but when you look at the graph of the COVID virus this year and you start to see the explosion and what that looks like, you start to develop an appreciation of what exponential growth looks like. For example, there is a famous story about a grieving Indian king in ancient times who had lost his son in a battle, and this servant of his introduced him to chess. The grieving king was brought out of his grief and he loved chess so much that he said to this servant, ‘I will grant you anything you want in life’. The servant said, ‘I would like to have one grain of rice for the first square and two grains of rice for the second square, four grains of rice for the third square’, et cetera. The king said that sounded fair and reasonable, until the king did the sums. So you look at the compound impact and the sum weight of the rice would be greater than the weight of the world. That is exponential growth. That is what it looks like.
Data is growing exponentially in our state and in our nation. We are having more and more datasets being created. One of the challenges we have as a society and particularly if you have got people like the member for Frankston talked about, a young child who has experienced trauma, the contact that that child will have with the state will be across multiple different agencies, multiple different individuals over a very short, concentrated period of time.

As an example, you will have an instance where the mother will have, potentially—or should have—prenatal check-ups. That is one form of data, and the child is born in the hospital system, so that is another one. You could say, ‘That’s in the health system, so that’s one dataset’. All right. You then have the maternal and child health visits. That is a separate set of data engagement. You then have child care. That is a third set. You then have three-year-old kinder and four-year-old kinder. Again more data gets you better results. Then by the time the child goes to school you are probably looking at a fifth set of data, and that is assuming everything is going right—that is, for every kid five sets of datasets are created in those first say four or five years of life. If you compound that in terms of contact with the police, if you compound that with contact from child protection, child welfare, you have more and more sets of data being created. The problem is that you have this rich set of data that is created, but the datasets do not speak to each other. So that is where gaps start to occur and that is where there are failings in the system.

By having an investment in three-year-old kinder and having 15 hours of three-year-old kinder, that presents the opportunity for a deeper level of data creation in relation to individuals. Then you can start to amass that data and then you can start doing some predictive analysis against that, and then you can have targeted interventions. The problem we have at the moment when you are operating in an analogue environment is if you see a problem and if you decide you want to do something, you will spray money at that problem and it will not necessarily be targeted or nuanced.

There are issues in relation to identification. There are issues in relation to the way in which the data is stored, so you have got to be careful. But for argument’s sake you could turn around and basically aggregate data to a unit level that is sufficiently granular to be able to do some predictive analysis without making it so aggregated that it is useless. For example, you can look through the acquisition of data from three-year-old kinder to then look at trying to find ways to look at all children who are at three-year-old kinder who live in public housing or all children who are doing three-year-old kinder who have been or whose families have been in contact with the juvenile justice system or the corrections system. Then, as you start to pull those datasets together, maybe you can start to say, ‘Well, for these cohorts, for these individuals, we need to do this analysis’. That is the great potential that data possesses, particularly from the point of view of the rapid expansion in terms of the number of datasets that the states are acquiring just through normal functioning. You are going to have a richer service, a richer level of data.

The other opportunity through having greater levels of data is that you can improve what in the private sector you would say is the customer experience but in government you would turn around and say it is the citizen experience. How can you try and make sure that the way in which citizens engage with government can be a better outcome and you do not have manual workarounds because you have got databases that are not talking to each other? Three-year-old kinder is becoming a really interesting time because the investment is occurring at a time when you are seeing a rapid increase in the level of data that is being created and the opportunity for those datasets through APIs, which are I think application programming interfaces, to talk to one another rather than being hardwired. Effectively, Speaker, if you are standing there, I am standing here, an API would be like the whip running between us providing information to each other. The member for Essendon is saying ‘X’, the Speaker is saying ‘Y’, and that allows databases to talk to each other. APIs will play a really, really important role going forward.

Having that rich dataset that has been created through three-year-old kinder in this investment is going to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of the public sector in this state, and it will provide the opportunity for better outcomes and more targeted outcomes. Again aggregated data—look, you can get stuff off the ABS, but when it is aggregated it really is quite useless from a big data perspective or
a data analytics perspective because it lumps the smart kids in with the kids who have got a more challenging environment or kids who have experienced trauma. You are putting wealthy children in with the most poor children and you are mixing it all together. It is pretty hard to do predictive analysis when you are just bundling everyone in together. The real benefit is being able to reduce the data down to that unit size level, obviously de-identifying it so there are no issues around those privacy breaches occurring. But it is presenting the opportunity to analyse this.

Data will be huge. Data is going to be centre of public administration within five to 10 years. This sort of investment is really important for the rich data that it will create. It will improve the quality of public administration in this state. It will also improve the educational outcomes for all children in this state. I commend the motion.

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (18:23): What an important topic this is for us to discuss this evening. Early childhood, as colleagues have said, is crucial to the lives of Victorians. I think the member for Oakleigh was saying the investment the government puts into early childhood in those years—and for a long time it has mostly been fourth year—pays off for a person’s life forever. We can think about the fact that we are doing for the kids, and it is great for kids, it is fantastic, and I will talk about some of my experiences with my kids in a moment. But I really like the idea that what we are really doing is investing in lives, in people’s lives, because it just makes their whole education journey better. Every extra moment you put in with play-based learning that is exceptional pays off, and we see that. I have seen that with my own kids. All my kids went to three-year kinder.

They did that around the Mount Waverley area. We have fantastic kinders, and a big hi to all the kinders down in my patch. My kids went to the Pinewood Preschool. You can watch them during that third year, and one of the things that the teachers do is absolutely fantastic—well, call them educators because they are educators. One of the things the educators do is on the first day they get the kids to draw themselves. So you have got these three-year-old kids, who are just so gorgeous, and on the first day they draw themselves. To be fair, there is little bit of abstract art going on. But then every three months they get them to draw themselves again, and so then they put it up on top of the older one. They do that for the third year and for the fourth year, and so when little Johnny or Mary comes home at the end of fourth-year kinder the parents are given this bit of artwork from day one all the way through fourth-year kinder. You go from a point where you have got Salvador Dali or Picasso and you get little people. You can see the transformation just in that one little exercise that two years of early childhood and play-based learning gives our kids. It is remarkable. Most of us have got kids here, and I am not selling you something that you have not already bought into.

I would like to talk a little bit about Pinewood Preschool, because I was lucky enough to be the president at Pinewood Preschool for a couple of years. That was, as I have said before in this house, my introduction to politics, and a kinder committee is a very good introduction to politics. I do not know if I learned anything, but it certainly was fun. I was president at a really auspicious time because it was a time when the Rudd-Gillard government were bringing in universal kinder access for fourth-year kinder. Fifteen hours—worldwide experts and experience and studies have shown that 15 hours of kinder for four-year-olds is the best way to prepare our kids for life, and I completely agree. What this government is doing and what we are talking about today is expanding that to provide universal access to 5 hours, paid, of third-year kinder.

Now, my kids all did 5 hours, but we paid for it.—Bec and I paid for that—and it was worth every cent. But not every family can afford that 5 hours. Well, I for one think that there should be no family who cannot get the same benefit that I got. That is not how we roll on this side. I am not saying that is how they roll on the other side. I reckon we would probably be together on that. I would hope so, anyway. But we look after the people who need it the most. That is how we should be judged, that is what we should do and that is what we are doing—$5 billion over the full length of this to teach our kids. Some of the people who will benefit the most are some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged people in Victoria. This is a very good thing that we are doing.
Now, at Pinewood they were a community-run kinder, and we still have a number of community-run kinders. So in my area, off the top of my head, there is Pinewood obviously; Syndal South is a community-run kinder, I believe; and Highmount Preschool was a cluster-managed kinder and then came back into being community run, which is a big deal for a community to take on, especially after you have already gone to cluster. So I will give a shout-out to Deb and the team from Pinewood and to all the teams at the others.

I think that too often for our educators, who we all love—we all see our kids going to kinder day after day, and we love the teachers and think well of them—as a society we underpay these people. Childhood educators—and teachers in general, but early childhood educators—especially at the certificate III and diploma level, do not earn a lot of money. They do not do it for the money, I can tell. There was a lady—

**The SPEAKER**: Order! I might just interrupt the member there. Now would be an opportune time for us to break for dinner. We will ring the bells and come back here to continue the discussion on this motion at 8.00 pm.

**Sitting suspended 6.30 pm until 8.02 pm.**

**Mr FREGON**: As I was saying before we were rudely interrupted by dinner, in early childhood this government has a lot to be proud of. One thing I want to talk about in regard to early childhood is our free TAFE initiative. Our early childhood educators are now able to upskill if they have a certificate III, potentially through the free TAFE program. If they do not, if they want to enter into the early childhood vocation—and it is a vocation—then certificate III is also available via the free TAFE program.

I was lucky enough to have the Premier visit our Holmesglen TAFE Waverley campus last year. We got to talk to some of the students that were in the certificate III and diploma courses for early childhood educators, and they were exceptionally skilled people. The teachers teaching them were fantastic. But what I really liked was the fact that there were a number of mostly women in the room, I will say, who were re-entering the workforce after leaving the workforce, and they were doing it sooner because free TAFE made it possible.

Women’s imbalance in general in superannuation partly comes from the fact that some women obviously leave the workforce to have children or for whatever other reason and then it takes time to come back. In those years they are not earning, so they are not getting super. If something like the free TAFE initiative in early childhood or in the many other courses that are available encourages women to get back into the workforce because that is what they want to do and it allows them to do that, then that sets them up not just for the days when they have passed that course and they go and work and they help nurture our children but it helps them for the rest of their lives. It helps them for their retirement. So this is investing in the future of all of our citizens with a free TAFE program. It is the long-term vision that we see again and again and again from the Andrews Labor government.

In the minute that I have got left I will mention the infrastructure that will be needed to go along with our three-year-old kinder rollout. I am very pleased to see that the three-year-old kinder rollout is starting in the regions. I think that is a fantastic area. It is probably an area, and I am sure the regional members will highlight this, where there is less take-up of three-year-old kinder. I will be interested to hear our regional members talk about that. But with having more children in three-year-old kinder we are going to need more space and more playgrounds to put them in, and that requires investment in infrastructure. I think this motion is fantastic, just like this government. I am a little biased obviously, but I commend the motion.

**Ms ADDISON** (Wendouree) (20:05): What a difficult act to follow. The member for Mount Waverley is always such a delight to listen to—the insights that he brings to this house, the popular culture references. I must admit I do turn the volume up if I am not in the chamber to hear the words of the member for Mount Waverley. He has not disappointed once again tonight.
Like the member for Mount Waverley, I am so pleased to speak on this motion that is before the house today. Early education is an issue that is important to so many families in Wendouree, and the rollout of the Andrews Labor government’s landmark reforms that will see $5 billion invested over the next decade to deliver 15 hours of three-year-old kinder has been very well received within my community.

The evidence is in and the evidence is clear: two years are better than one when it comes to early learning. Our kindergartens are not only places where children learn but where they create, where they innovate and where they play. They are a vital part of our community. Therefore it is crucial that we invest in our educators, our kinder programs, our infrastructure, to support them. How children learn is changing because knowledge is changing faster for them than any other generation in history. It has never been more important to invest in and develop a culture of curiosity and creative thinking. That is why we are revolutionising early learning by providing three-year-old kinder for every Victorian child.

I would really and sincerely like to thank the mover of this motion, the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education, the member for Carrum, for her commitment to this portfolio and commend her for her excellent contribution to this debate but more importantly for the landmark work she is doing in the field of early education. The introduction of 15 hours of three-year-old kinder is about ensuring that our youngest Victorians get the very best start in life. It will be transformative in both the short term and the longer term for our children and for our state. I am proud to be a part of a government that is again implementing transformative social policy for Victoria.

Kinders hold a special place in the hearts of many families, and it was lovely to hear the member for Mount Waverley talk about how important being a kinder parent was to him and watching his children grow. They are where our children make their first friends. They learn to cut with scissors, they learn to sing new songs and play new games. They are often exposed to the different cultures of their friends and educators. They do the sensory and messy play that many parents cannot or will not do at home. They learn invaluable social skills as well as literacy and communication skills through play. They experience creativity, technology and maths. They cement the skills that they need for school. In fact children learn more quickly in the first five years of their life than at any other time. As a former schoolteacher I know first hand that attending three-year-old and four-year-old kindergarten is so important to a child’s development because 90 per cent of brain development occurs before a child turns five. These early years are also crucial for early intervention for children with disabilities and vulnerable children. By giving children that additional year at kinder we are providing them with a safety net and setting them up for future success.

I wish to commend the Minister for Education, our Deputy Premier, for his exceptional leadership through the coronavirus and his hardworking advisers in his ministerial office, including Chris, Sinead, Liam and Alice. As well as impacting on students at schools, TAFEs and universities across Victoria, the coronavirus also impacted on our littlest learners who attend kindergarten. That is why I am very proud that the Andrews Labor government announced $45 million in additional funding to provide support for sessional kindergarten providers. This funding was to provide support in light of numbers declining significantly as more and more parents chose to keep their children at home at the commencement of the coronavirus pandemic. The funding of approximately $485 per child enrolled for term 2 was significant as it allowed providers to continue teaching and caring for Victorian kids, importantly including the children of essential workers, such as our nurses, our cleaners, our supermarket and pharmacy employees, all for free during term 2. It also provided for vulnerable children to be able to continue their 15-hour kinder programs and interactions with early educators during the time of restrictions and lockdown for free.

I wish to thank the Eureka Community Kindergarten Association and all our early educators across Ballarat for the work they did during the coronavirus pandemic keeping our children safe and supporting them with their learning. I would also like to recognise the amount of work that has been done by our kinders to make sure that drop-offs and pick-ups are safe for parents, for carers and for children while maintaining social distancing. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.
Both our girls attended three-year-old kinder at Fidelity kinder in Ballarat Central. I would particularly like to thank the amazing early educators at Fidelity, Heather and Mary, and all the other educators who have had such a positive influence on the lives of our daughters. Kinders across Victoria are very, very special places. At Fidelity every child is valued and has the opportunity to learn, explore, make choices, cooperate, collaborate, investigate, negotiate and create meaning to the extent of their current knowledge and abilities. It is a safe place for children to learn, to make mistakes and to thrive as they grow an awareness about themselves and the world they live in. Three-year-old kinder was so beneficial for my children in developing early numeracy and literacy skills, encouraging a love of books and painting and in promoting their imagination and their role play as well as being a vital time to build confidence, relationships and a sense of self.

I believe that every child in Victoria should have access to quality three-year-old kinder for 15 hours per week and that no child should be left behind. The benefits of the early years education project for children do not just flow into the school years but well beyond, and we certainly heard from the Minister for Youth Justice, who has just walked in, about the prison population and the importance of providing kids with education and support. We have made a number of commitments in this space. Our commitment to early education requires a huge investment in local infrastructure and education and training for early educators. That is why we are investing $5 billion over 10 years. This will give all young children the chance to have access to a high-quality foundation to their education. It is not only investment in infrastructure and equipment but an investment in Victoria’s future. We know that early education is so important, and the evidence is in. Researchers are united in demonstrating that quality play-based learning is a powerful way to support children’s learning and development. The Australian Early Development Census shows us that the foundations of one’s success, health and emotional wellbeing can be traced back to early childhood.

Cost should be no barrier to accessing three-year-old kinder. All parents should have the same opportunity to give their children—our youngest students—the best start in life regardless of household income. This is an important issue of equality and of opportunity for all. This government has prioritised our youngest Victorians because we know that is where we can make a real difference. We are making Victoria the Education State. Not only are we looking after our youngest people but we are making sure that we undertake this policy reform in a strategic way by beginning with six regional local government areas before we start with another 15 local government areas. By 2022 children in my community will have access to 5 hours of subsidised kindergarten before it is fully rolled out in 2029.

It is very important that with more three-year-olds than ever attending kinder we have more early educators. That is why we are supporting our future early learning educators by adding the diploma of early childhood education and care, and the certificate III in early childhood education and care to free TAFE. This will remove the financial barriers for people who wish to train or retrain. We are also providing financial support in the form of scholarships and employment incentives for people looking for a rewarding career in the early childhood sector. I encourage anyone who would like to be an early educator to look into this.

In conclusion, once again we are putting words into action across Victoria. Three-year-old kinder will make a real difference to the lives of local kids thanks to amazing educators. Victoria is the Education State and the Andrews Labor government is delivering for all Victorians, including our littlest ones, with kinder, and they will continue to reap the benefits of our record investment into schools as they continue their education journey. With the $5 billion investment we are making over the next decade I am sure that Victorian kids will have a fantastic future. I commend this motion to the house.

Ms WARD (Eltham) (20:15): I also rise in support of this motion following the honourable member for Wendouree. Like her, I had a fantastic experience with kinder as well. The kinder at Eltham South is magnificent. It is a beautiful bush kinder, which, Speaker, as you would know, is typical of our area. Most of our kinders are bush kinders, helping our kids embrace the natural environment and learn through play in that natural environment. I want to give a shout-out to Sue and
Jenny at four-year-old kinder, who were fantastic for both of our two girls, as well as the three-year-old kinder teachers, Michelle and Kerry, who are just fabulous, amazing women. It is not until you are at kinder that you realise how much work is actually involved in teaching small children and how much patience is involved in teaching small children. But understanding the variety of ways in which children can learn through play, the way that children can learn from doing really simple activities—like making mud pies, like pouring things from one container to another, by stacking wooden blocks, by playing with each other—the things that they learn are actually quite incredible.

For anybody who does not value early learning education and anybody who does not value learning through play, I would encourage you to go to your local kinder and actually see what they do and see throughout the day those little light-bulb moments that go off in kids’ heads as they start to connect things as they are playing at their toy kitchens, as they are rolling around in little wheelee trolley cars, as they are playing on seesaws, as they are interacting with learning materials. They are just, as we all know, sponges.

Kinders are incredibly important, and as the member for Wendouree said, we know that those early years are vital. We know that those early years are where we capture kids, where we can really help those neurones connect in their mind to help them be healthy but help them really understand how the world works, how to connect things, how to focus on education, how to even sit still, how to hold a pencil and how to hold a paintbrush. We know that in some families those skills are taught through parental guidance, but there are many families where that does not actually happen. This is the incredibly vital role that early childhood education plays, which is for those children who through no fault of their own do not have that parental guidance to help them understand how to hold a pencil, how to hold a paintbrush, how to tie shoelaces, how to draw, how to colour in, how to play with other kids, how to negotiate, how to be. That is what kinder fulfils.

Kinder gives the level playing field that those of us on this side are always striving for, that equality of opportunity. And through providing universal three-year-old kinder, through providing for those 15 hours, that is what we are doing. We are living our fundamental belief here as a Labor Party and as a Labor government, which is creating that equality of opportunity. The 2019–20 budget invested nearly $900 million in education, which gave children access to two years of subsidised kinder programs delivered by a teacher before starting school. Again, reiterating the words of the member for Wendouree but also other members, neuroscience has shown the early years, particularly birth to eight years, are critical for optimal learning and development. Preschool attendance has shown consistent positive short- and long-term effects across the world. Play-based preschool programs delivered by quality early childhood educators improve children’s learning and developmental outcomes and are particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Last year Australian states and territories released a report arguing that the single most important reform that any government could do to improve education outcomes was increased access to three-year-old kinder. What that tells me is that it is not just about the educational outcomes. It is not just about enhancing those kids’ opportunities at that young age. There is also an economic benefit to that education. It also means that those kids are going to go through school better. At the other end they are going to have a better educational outcome and they are going to have a better developmental outcome. And ‘developmental’ means more than just book learning. We know that two years of kinder has a greater benefit than one, especially for children, as I said, who are disadvantaged.

We also need to build infrastructure to provide for the growth in preschool numbers. Last year’s budget included $473 million for early childhood infrastructure. Speaker, I know that you would share with me looking forward to Banyule taking advantage of some of that funding for our kinders. I know that you are very passionate about your kinders and making sure that they have got the provisions that they need. You and I have had many conversations about kinders, especially in catchment areas that we share, but I also hope that Nillumbik council engages in this funding as well and does put some money in their kinders.
One kinder I am particularly passionate about is the Eltham Preschool, located in Main Road, a gorgeous little bush kinder, and I tell you what, there would not be too many kinders that are located in the middle of a suburb—or township, as we like to call it in Eltham—that has a bush kinder, that has a natural playing environment that is bushy and gorgeous and lovely. And they could do with some extra funding to help improve their building and facilities. I am pleased to say that the YMCA Ballarat has taken on this kinder and will from next year help them manage their kinder and give them the stability that they need.

I commend the parents and community who have worked incredibly hard to strengthen this kinder, this kinder that faced challenges when Nillumbik council was going to sell it to be developed. These parents and the community have fought to keep that kinder and have helped sustain it over this year when they have had some uncertainty about the future of the kinder in terms of who would be managing it, and I am grateful that the YMCA Ballarat has taken on that role. I know that this kinder, which is fully enrolled, will be something that the YMCA Ballarat will very much enjoy being a part of. I really would encourage the kinder as well as Nillumbik council to talk with the state government about how we can best support them, make that kinder and make that building and the infrastructure be the best that it can be, because the funding is there.

The opportunities are there for all of our local councils, including Nillumbik, to take advantage of this funding and create some amazing spaces. We know that three-year-old kinder as it is rolled out across the state—and in my area it will be in 2022—will need additional infrastructure. They will need additional spaces for those children to have that educational opportunity. In my area we have a lot of kids in four-year-old kinder and we have a lot of kids in three-year-old kinder, and to be able to have those two programs running concurrently we will need greater infrastructure. It would be short-sighted for any council to not take advantage of these funding opportunities which are available to them, because our kinders are fantastic. Our kinders are where community starts.

Now, it may not be evident for anybody who has not been a primary caregiver, but kinder is your first experience as a parent with other parent communities. You have your mothers group, but that can be from different places. With kinder these are neighbourhood kids; these are neighbourhood families. These are families that you will connect with and possibly even have friendships for decades.

My kids are still at school with kids they knew from kinder, and it is lovely. It is really lovely that they have that more than a decade-long connection with other kids. It is lovely that I can go and call into Eltham High and see parents that I have seen when our children were three and four years old. It is nice to bump into them at the supermarket. It is nice to be on fundraising committees with them. It is nice to share those experiences together and share those experiences together as a community, and kinder gives you that opportunity. Waiting at the kinder for your kids to finish, dropping the kids off; it is joyful; it really is. They are lovely, those connections that you make, and they are not the connections that you can always get at child care because you are dropping off and picking up at different times. Kinder is a lovely introduction to a new school community, to developing those community connections.

An interesting thing that could come out of this COVID pandemic and people working from home is that more people might actually want sessional kinder. They might be working from home longer and more often as we go forward. To be able to drop your kid off at a local kinder—Eltham Preschool, for example, is within walking distance of many, many homes—and then pick them up later in the day I think will work for many, many families. I do think that community-based kinder is going to be increasingly popular as more people stay working from home because it is working for them. And it is terrific that this government has been able to not necessarily foresee the future but has planned for it. It has planned for changes in our community by recognising the importance of three-year-old kinder and has supported three-year-old kinder. I support this motion.

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (20:25): It is with great pleasure that I rise in this place today to talk to this motion. As we know, the Andrews Labor government is committed to not just three-year-old
kinder but education whether it be three- or four-year-old kinder, primary and secondary years or free TAFE. Right across the board this government has invested significantly, obviously record investment not just in our first term but now into our second term as the Andrews Labor government. And it is no surprise. Victoria is the Education State because Labor governments have continuously delivered for education.

Can I just say, I know it is now moving towards 8.30 pm and obviously being only in my first term this is the first time I have had to stay back late. I just wanted to quickly thank—

A member interjected.

Mr TAYLOR: That is true. I am pretty sure Richmond are getting significantly put to bed in their own way as well this evening, much to my dismay. But I wanted to just thank all the parliamentary staff staying behind tonight. I did promise Karen Fox I would get her into Hansard tonight. The fantastic manager of catering out there does a great job, so a big thankyou to Karen as well, and it is very disappointing to hear about Richmond.

As a 28-year-old I have often been questioned—I was questioned as a 26-year-old when I first got onto local government, representing Collier ward in Knox city—‘Young man, what do you know about early childhood education and about kindergarten?’ To be honest with you, when I was first there, not a great deal. I must say I have been very happy to be educated and to have learned as much as I have in this small space of time not just about this government’s commitment to the early years space but also about the wonderful work of early childhood staff as well as the fantastic work that volunteer committees do, in particular in our three-year-old space and the significant burden that is placed on them.

I know this government’s reforms are changing the game in terms of three-year-old kinder not just from a committee perspective and taking away some of the burden that they face as committees but also subsidising it and rolling it out across the decade. I know in the first instance we are rolling out 5 hours in particular to our regional spaces. For my area, Knox and Maroondah, 2022 will see 5 hours of access to three-year-old kinder, which is extremely exciting. My community is extremely excited. I know from talking to stakeholders out there and to early childhood providers they are looking forward to it.

My first dealing, as I touched on there, with early childhood started at Knox council. I remember going out and doing the committee elections as the newly sworn-in councillor. I remember my PA was emailing me and saying, ‘All right, Jackson, this committee wants you out at Templeton Orchards’ and the like. I remember my first dealing was the committee elections. I was like, ‘My God, all these parents do such an amazing job’. They volunteer, they run budgets, they run the kindergarten essentially, and a fantastic job they do.

One of the kindergartens I remember that I first had dealings with in my role in council was the new Bayswater early years hub, and what an amazing hub that is. That building is set to last 100 years. It is I believe an $11 million or $12 million facility. My first dealing with it was when, as politicians do—we pull the shovel out and we pretend to turn that first sod; often there will be somebody in the background who has probably already has turned the first sod—I turned the first sod with the then Minister for Early Childhood Education, Jenny Mikakos from the other place. The Andrews government had committed $1.6 million to delivering this beautiful, bright hub which delivers not just four-year-old kinder, and hopefully into the future three-year-old subsidised kinder thanks to the Andrews Labor government, but also long day care, occasional care and maternal and child health services, which I also learned about, as well as what I have been talking in this place today about, the blue book.

I did not know what a blue book was. Apparently it tracks a child all the way through the very early and formative years. We know the difference that three-year-old kinder makes in the life of a child and how young people are so perceptive—so much of their brain capacity is formed in those early
years, and we know the difference that this three-year-old kinder will make. I know not just the former Minister for Early Childhood Education from the other place came out to the facility but the Premier wanted to see this fantastic facility for himself as well. So the Premier came out, and we have got a video on Facebook to prove it, just for those of you who do not believe it. He came out, and he was extremely impressed. Can I just say, sometimes we give councils a hard go. We bash councils a little bit when they certainly deserve it from time to time.

**Mr Carbines** interjected.

**Mr TAYLOR:** The member for Ivanhoe maybe disagrees. He has got a very friendly council out his way. But Knox City Council, I must say, do a fantastic job. They are the largest provider of early years services in the local government area. They delivered two early years hubs—not just in Bayswater, where the Andrews Labor government committed $1.6 million, which is a significant investment and a significant showing of a local commitment in Knox to early years services, but also in Wantirna South, where the early years hub is equally impressive. It has solar panels, as I said, and a 100-year lifespan. It is going to be a mainstay of that community and is going to deliver for hundreds of kids moving through its corridors for many, many, many years to come.

I know we are talking about some of the reforms we are making with kindergartens on school sites, and already in my electorate we have got Boronia K–12, which is a very, very great school. Meagan Cook is an amazing principal there. Obviously ‘K–12’ would tell you we have got a kindergarten onsite there. She is extremely excited about the opportunities. Obviously 2022 is when we move to three-year-old kinder—up to 5 hours access in my part of the world. But she is excited about the building-block grants that the Andrews government announced—those larger grants, but some of those middle-tier grants as well—to make some smaller, minor capital works improvements. She is excited about working within that sphere as well, but she is also excited about the educational benefit from not just four- but three-year-old kinder all the way through to year 12, keeping people onsite, keeping them within their communities and having them familiar with a community space. That is different. That is something that no government before this government has done, and I think it is a significant piece of reform. We talk about the bricks and mortar, but some of these—perhaps on face value smaller—reforms are just as significant to our local communities.

Around kindergartens and school sites as well there is Birch Street Children and Family Centre at Bayswater Primary School. I do not do favourites, I must say; however, if I had one, it would be pretty close. The principal there, Brooke Cross, is an amazing principal, and very proudly we have delivered a brand-new building.

**Mr Carbines** interjected.

**Mr TAYLOR:** Member for Ivanhoe, I am glad to see your attentiveness. We have delivered a brand-new building, four new classrooms, a new admin wing and a new toilet block. That school does not even know itself, and they also very proudly have the Birch Street kinder onsite. From talking to the principal there, Brooke Cross, I know how excited she is, not just at the building-block grants but at having that opportunity once again to have young people onsite, learning from three to four years all the way through, and then through as well, hopefully, onwards to Bayswater Secondary College, where we have just announced very recently the Bayswater Education Plan. It may seem insignificant—$500 000 of planning money—but have no doubt about it, the education plan does not just talk to our commitments to Bayswater Primary School but to four local primary schools: Bayswater Primary, Bayswater North Primary, Bayswater West Primary and Bayswater South Primary as well. Bayswater Secondary College forms part of the Bayswater Education Plan, and this is going to change the face of education in Bayswater. This will carry on from kindergarten all the way to Bayswater Secondary College, through to year 12 and on to employment. This is going to change the game and change the way that we do education in Bayswater, and that is another thing that the Andrews Labor government is delivering in its second term to education locally, within my patch. I know that my schools are extremely excited, and we are looking forward to the future investments and
the opportunities to continue to invest in education locally but also to looking at how we can further provide first-rate facilities to give kids the best start in life. When we talk about three-year-old kinder, that is what it is about.

Education: it is not a cost on a spreadsheet. It is not something you can say is something that you have to put over the forward estimates. It is an investment, plain and simple. That is exactly what this is about, three-year-old kinder. It is an investment in the lives of young people across the state of Victoria. I talk about Bayswater, and every local member will respectively talk about their communities, but it is an investment in kids in Victoria and that is nothing to sneeze at. That is something we should be proud of. That is what this Andrews government is renowned for. When I call local constituents, they are never mistaken about which party stands for education. It is the Andrews Labor government. It is the Labor Party—as it has been, and as it always will be.

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) (20:35): I am very pleased to make a contribution on this matter in relation to kindergarten services across the Victorian community. Let me just take us way, way back—and do not do yourself a neck injury as I take you right back to my days on Banyule City Council in the mid to late 1990s, when in West Heidelberg we did sell, we did make the big decisions, and we sold land for $750 000. We took a bit of a punt as we headed towards the time under the Baillieu government—$750 000, a contribution in sale of that land to new family and learning service centres in West Heidelberg in 3081.

On Banyule City Council we made sure that every kindergarten and every early learning service was run by Banyule City Council, because when people are under the pump and when families are under the pump not every community and not everybody has the extracurricular time and the skills and the services—as much as they love their kids—to be able to devote extra time to running those services. Sometimes they need the support of the fact that they pay their rates to their community and their council to maybe get some people to step in and make sure those services are delivered. Their job is to make sure that they are earning a wage, that they are working hard in the community and that they are commuting at the lamington stalls and the rest of it to make sure that those kindergarten services are working well and that they are supporting those families and their kids there. But sometimes they need some help to make sure those services are being delivered.

To Banyule City Council in 3081—in very much a working-class postcode—we made sure that every kindergarten and early learning service was run by Banyule City Council. And we made sure that for all those families and communities that paid their rates and delivered their kids to those services those services were run, and we met every absolute commitment on qualifications and on outstanding services—we made sure that happened. All that anybody in that community needed to do was pay their rates, and they sent their kids there and they got them there and they got a great service in the most fantastic local kindergartens that we could provide.

But what was particularly important was that we made sure that when the tough times came we sold some of those services—up to $750 000, three-quarters of a million dollars—to make sure 10 years ago, more than that, that it would be a contribution to a new family learning centre for young people in West Heidelberg. Not just for those that want to go to kinder but for when you have a baby and you are scratching around looking to meet some local families and some mums and some dads to maybe get a bit of a handle on what is going on when you are feeling a bit on your own and when you need to be supported and you are working with your maternal and child health service and all you need to do is connect with some other mums, you need to get with some other dads, and you need to meet some people. We said, ‘Let’s make sure that we sell that site for $750 000, and if it does not sell for that, that is the contribution that we would make on council’. So I did that as a Banyule city councillor.

I was then elected in 2010 and we had a commitment to build a $2 million centre—we had three-quarters of a million dollars towards that centre. The Liberal government under Ted Baillieu had no choice but to back it in because it was already funded in the Labor government budgets under John Brumby—but of course what happened? Well, I can tell you what happened. Our daughter was born
in May 2012, so nearly three years after I had made these decisions at the Banyule City Council to make this commitment of a very bare minimum of three-quarters of a million dollars to the West Heidelberg community. I went there, I shuffled out from St Vincent’s Hospital. I left my wife and daughter at the hospital to get out there to go to the sod-turn with a member in the other place, a member for Northern Metropolitan, Craig Ondarchie. I shuffled my way out there as the crab-like Liberals tried to turn a sod on a site without me there, even though I had delivered three-quarters of a million dollars to that project as a Banyule city councillor. They tried to turn a sod to say they were delivering this $2 million project. In May 2012 my daughter was born. That is how long it took before they contributed the other funds, before they could even get a shovel out to turn a sod.

I tell you what, who was there in 2015 as the local member, a member of the government to deliver on that project, who just happened to have been the local Banyule city councillor back in 2009–10 who got the $750 000 to bloody prod the government to deliver the other $1.25 million for that project? The very best we could get from an upper house member for Northern Metropolitan Region was a big shiny shovel and his little high-vis vest funded by his electorate office budget, saying ‘Mr Craig Ondarchie, the honourable member for Northern Metropolitan’.

I came out there from St Vincent’s Hospital. They were back there in hospital, my wife and child, and I thought, do you know what? We might just use these services. We just might be there. We delivered that $750 000 in funding for that kindergarten in West Heidelberg. We put a flag in the ground and we said, ‘You know what? Trust us and we will get this done. We will make sure of that at the very minimum’, because land values in West Heidelberg unfortunately are not very high, and that affects our capacity to leverage private investment. The member for Broadmeadows would know this well. This is our constant challenge. We have government funding all the time. We just cannot get private investment to get the job done. But I tell you what, we made a commitment: ‘Regardless of what it sells for we are delivering $750 000 to get this project off the ground’, and then we chased down $1.25 million.

We had a $2 million project, but it took a Labor councillor in West Heidelberg from 2005 to 2010 to get that commitment, and then it took winning an election in 2010 to get into this place and hunt them down to turn a shovel in 2012 and then hunt them down when they went back out to tender for a second time—because they just could not get it done—and then to get the project going and deliver that project in 2015. I opened the doors to that place, to families in West Heidelberg in 2015. My goodness, if it did not take me 10 years in two of our three tiers of government to get the job done for the people of West Heidelberg, and to virtually have a kid of your own and to understand the desire of and the need for people in needy communities to have these services!

Understand that when we walked past it, this was on the Olympic Village Primary School site where we hived a bit of land off. At the time I was working as the chief of staff to the Minister for Education, a former member for Melbourne, the Honourable Bronwyn Pike, to make sure that—do you know what, we can do this. We can hive off a bit of this land from the primary school for a family and community centre. We can make sure under Kevin Rudd and the Labor government at the time that we can leverage some extra funding to make this happen in West Heidelberg.

Do you know what we have done as well as that? Since that time, this very year, we have opened on the remainder of that Olympic Village Primary School site a brand-new $6 million primary school for the people of West Heidelberg, a prep to grade 6 primary school, and on the corner that we hived off we have got a family and learning centre for the people of West Heidelberg. It took us $2 million to build that family learning centre from birth to primary school and then $6 million to build a primary school. So we are taking care of people from the time that they are born and they are chasing services and support and advice as families to work out how to be supported when their kids are born right through to the time they are looking for a place in a high school and where they might want to take their lives from there. We are doing that from birth right through until they are 12-year-olds. This is very significant for anyone who has had a family, anyone that understands the contribution and the investment that we have made.
There are lots of difficulties in these projects. In West Heidelberg we all understand about the pilots but we never see the planes. We always see the plans and the trials, and we are a bit sick of it. What we want to see are the bricks and mortar and the delivery. People say, ‘We are not a bloody test tube. We are not somewhere where people just come down and do a bit of testing’ and ‘Let’s see how it goes’ and we never see them again. We are not interested in the plans. We are not interested in the consultants. We are interested in the bricks and mortar. We are interested in the real investment, and we deliver on that, but it has taken a very, very long time. It has taken being on the council to commit the money and put a flag in the ground early. It has been living through the dire straits of an inert government that did nothing for people in West Heidelberg other than selling off their public housing, and then getting back into government and delivering the project and continuing in government to make sure that we can deliver on the primary school as well.

These are real investments. Do not take my word for it—go out there and have a look on Southern Road, have a look at Alamein Road. Go and have a look and see. It is right there right now, a $6 million primary school for prep to grade 6. The living and learning centre is there for those from birth to school, and we continue to invest in our local services. I can tell you now West Heidelberg has always stood with our Labor government because they back in those that deliver for them. I am impressed and supportive and absolutely committed to delivering further for those communities that are doing it tough. No one should think at this time of crisis and difficulties in the economy that there are not people doing it tough. We will continue to invest in the people in the 3081 postcode.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (20:46): Well, what a mighty contribution that was. It is my particular pleasure to rise in support of the motion from the member for Carrum:

That this house recognises the rollout of the Andrews Labor government’s landmark reforms that will see $5 billion invested over the next decade to deliver a full 15 hours of three-year-old kinder.

Fifteen hours, I tell you! I thought I would begin my contribution this evening by illuminating the house about some of the history of the kindergarten. Friedrich Fröbel, a German educator, opened the first kindergarten in Blankenburg, Germany, in 1837. During the 1830s and 1840s he developed his vision for kindergarten based on the ideas of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the latest Swiss educator—and this is a name that only a Swiss person could have, I suspect—Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. These progressive education reformers introduced the concept that children were naturally good and active learners. At the time this thinking was pretty radical, and the common belief until then had been that children were little creatures who needed stern handling to become good adults. Play was seen as a waste of time and proof that children should be tamed so they can be more productive. Undaunted, Fröbel argued that teachers should use music, nature study, stories and dramatic play to teach children. He encouraged the use of crafts and manipulatives, such as small building blocks or puzzles. He also promoted the idea of circle time, for children to learn in a group. Fröbel proposed that children acquire cognitive and social skills by using their natural curiosity and desire to learn. He believed women had the best sensitivity and qualities to work with young children in developing their emotional skills, and consequently Fröbel opened a training school just for women. This was the 1830s, mind you.

The word ‘kindergarten’ of course means ‘garden of children’, and Fröbel felt that this was a beautiful metaphor for what happens there: children growing like flowers nurtured by a positive environment with good soil, rain and sun as well as an attentive gardener. But Fröbel’s ideas were so radical that the Prussian government closed all kindergartens in 1851, fearing a socialist revolutionary movement. Nevertheless, the concept spread quickly throughout the rest of the world, and by the end of the 19th century many countries had started kindergartens, albeit for middle-class children. Then between 1900 and the start of World War I, England and France began to establish free kindergartens for poor children. So too in Australia, where kindergarten teaching was championed by innovative and enlightened educationists, entrepreneurs and philanthropists.

In the early 1900s it was considered an essential part of the new education espoused by leading educationists, including the New South Wales and Victorian directors of education Peter Board and
Frank Tate. But it proved too expensive to implement. Some of these themes have a certain familiarity to them, do they not, member for Bayswater, who I notice is following attentively. Nevertheless, the movement for kindergartens had begun, though it was dependent upon women educators and philanthropists prepared to work voluntarily or for a pittance. Indeed Australia’s first kindergartens principally came about because of the efforts of first-wave feminists. Throughout the 20th century kindergarten teaching was led by professional, practical, devoted women, but it remained marginal to mainstream educational discourse and administration.

Many of the earlier kindergarten leaders, however, appeared to prefer the independence this gave them. From the beginning kindergarten teaching was seen as women’s work and remained that way for decades. Not until 1969 did this begin to change, with one male entering a kindergarten teacher training course at the Queensland University of Technology. Being a feminised career added to its marginalisation, but paradoxically it created one of the few professional areas that women have always led. For decades kindergartens lacked government funding and remained largely dependent upon volunteers.

Histories of the Australian kindergarten movement have acknowledged the continuing influence of particular women, and it is the achievement of one of these women, Emmeline Pye, that I wish to draw the house’s attention to in particular. Pye established Victoria’s first state-funded kindergarten in 1907 at Albert Street in Brunswick. Concurrently she was the mistress of method at Melbourne Teachers College in Carlton, where she lectured in kindergarten and infant teaching from 1902 to 1918. She was considered a most gifted and innovative teacher, introducing free activity periods, encouraging children’s individuality and training student teachers in child study methods and experimentation in accordance with Fröbelian concepts. In 1907 Pye demonstrated kindergarten methods with classrooms of children at the Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work in Melbourne. I quote:

… the hall was beset all afternoon by hundreds unable to obtain admission.

In 1915 she produced for the Victorian education department the first honours course for infant teachers conducted at the teachers college—and I hasten to clarify that is for teachers of infants, not infants seeking to be teachers.

Undoubtedly Emmeline Pye was one of the pioneers of kindergarten education as a teacher and as a teacher of teachers. Labor, like Emmeline Pye, understands the importance of education, be it for our littlest people or for the educators themselves. That workforce is a valuable workforce, and it is valued by this government. Indeed growing the workforce is one of the major challenges and critical parts of this reform, this very important reform. As of this month, June 2020, we have made nearly 1000 offers of financial support—scholarships—to eligible students studying an early childhood teaching qualification. We have started a targeted campaign encouraging potential early childhood teachers to apply for financial support. A larger campaign will be rolled out across the state later in the year, which will highlight the value of the early childhood teaching profession. We are supporting beginning early childhood teachers with additional mentors and professional development conferences, we have funded 250 kindergarten service providers with grants to help support almost 600 provisionally registered teachers achieve full registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and we have established early childhood professional practice partnerships between four universities and early childhood service providers that deliver a kindergarten program to enable leading practice in initial teacher education. We are also working with the higher ed sector through meetings of vice-chancellors and the newly established three-year-old kindergarten implementation, education and training reference group.

Recently my electorate was fortunate enough to receive three new early childhood language programs alongside the three existing programs. These programs at Glen Iris Road Kindergarten, Highgate Early Learning Centre, Estrella Preschool, Alfred Road Kindergarten, Clever Kids Childcare and Through Road Child Care centre will provide young children the chance to learn new languages and develop new skills. We know the enormous benefits of learning a second language when you are young. By
learning a second language those in the Andrews Labor government’s three-year-old kinder program can expect to see increased reading and writing skills, cognitive flexibility, strength and brain development and improved problem-solving skills. These benefits cannot be overstated, and they will be lifelong. Those children will be better equipped to tackle the challenges that life throws at them and enter our school programs better prepared than ever before.

I also wanted to talk briefly about the Wattle Park Children’s Services Centre, which is home to a wonderful bush kinder—and I know, Acting Speaker Ward, that in your contribution on this motion you highlighted the bush kinder in Eltham. Well, there is a terrific bush kinder even closer to town in the great state seat of Burwood. Students at the centre have the opportunity to utilise Wattle Park, a place that has been described only this week in this house as an oasis. Soon more children will enjoy this park thanks to this government’s investment in three-year-old kinder and be able to experience its natural beauty and enjoy discovering its secrets, home to Australia’s oldest Gallipoli Lone Pine, predating that of Melbourne or Canberra. More young Victorians will be able to not only access the benefits of kindergarten but also learn more about the environment and the history of Australia as result of Andrews Labor government initiatives. These children will have the remarkable opportunity put before them where they will get to experience the wonders of kindergarten and a revitalised Wattle Park. Just this week in this house we discussed the exciting new developments in the revitalisation of one of Burwood’s hidden gems, including a new playground that I am sure generations of young Victorians will come to enjoy.

I would like to talk briefly about Ashwood Memorial Kindergarten, which is located on Arthur Street in my electorate. It celebrates a long history. Just last year they celebrated their 50th year of operation. I had the great fortune of going down there and meeting one of the teachers who had had the privilege of teaching there for 30 or 35 years. She was a magnificent woman and related many tales of her time teaching literally generations of Ashwood locals at that kindergarten.

Children at the Ashwood Memorial Kindergarten, as the kinder itself says, get to experience what they do best, which is being a child, and I could not be more thrilled to see that more young Victorians are going to get the opportunity to take part in this program and take advantage of the $5 billion investment over the next decade to ensure that all three-year-olds get to experience the advantages of early childhood education and kindergarten.

This is the largest social, economic and educational reform in early childhood education in Victoria’s history. It builds upon a proud history of delivering for education by the great Australian Labor Party, and I commend the motion to the house.

Ms Hutchins (Sydenham) (20:56): It is with pleasure that I rise to talk to this motion in regard to three-year-old kinder. Not only is it a signature social policy for this government that delivers so much at so many levels, but it is an absolute commitment to our future, to growing our future and investing in our future.

I never dreamed in a million years that I would hear such passionate speeches about kindergarten in this place, but certainly the members that I have heard tonight on this—the members for Bayswater, Ivanhoe, Burwood and even yourself, Acting Speaker, for the people of Eltham when you spoke with passion about kinder: it is like we all know how important this policy is and this investment is for the future of Victorians. As many of the other speakers have talked about, around 90 per cent of brain development in kids occurs before the age of five, including critical cognitive development, and that is what makes this commitment to three-year-old kinder so important. International studies consistently show long-term benefits for kids who attend two years of kinder over a single year of attendance—two years of high-quality, teacher-led programs where they use tactics around play for kids to be able to learn. Victorian children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have substantial long-term educational and economic benefits to gain.
I myself went to kinder at a place called Park Towers kindergarten, which is a kindergarten inside the public housing of Park Towers in South Melbourne, where I lived with my family at the time. That opportunity to go to kinder for me—I think I was three going on four—and having fantastic teachers there who spoke many languages: the cohort of kids were from many countries, but they used play to communicate with all of us, even those that could not speak English yet. I am really proud to say I still know some of those kids at this stage of my life, and many of them have gone on to do really successful things with their lives, including one that has become one of the state’s top psychologists.

So kinder does sit with you for life. It can change lives, and I am so pleased with our investment, because as I said this is an absolute win for not only our kids of the future but it is also a win for our investment in infrastructure and also our investment in the early childhood workforce, because we are offering opportunities to recruit, to entice and to engage and expand the careers of our kinder staff and our kinder teachers.

I actually had a family member who was a kinder teacher, and she left the profession because she felt that being a kinder teacher was undervalued and underpaid, and that was almost 10 years ago. I remember her feeling, even though she had been to university and she had got a degree in early childhood, that leaving the industry and becoming a bookkeeper was basically of better financial advantage to her and her family, rather than staying in the system. But I know with this investment as a government, this commitment of $92.4 million over the next five years to support early childhood scholarships and incentive programs to get more people teaching, we are putting the call out loud and clear as a government that we need more teachers in the sector, because we cannot build this vision, we cannot deliver on three-year-old kinder, unless we have the workforce to back us up.

That includes the creation of more than 4000 new early childhood teachers and 2000 new educator roles across the state. To underpin that incentive and recruitment we have offered financial support through the process of having grants, and the funding can be used to pay for course fees, living costs or the purchase of books or computers that assist with the study. These are pretty substantial grants that are available, and whether people are starting their study, upskilling or already studying early childhood, there is financial support available to them now. They could be eligible for up to $25 000 towards an approved undergraduate qualification, $12 000 towards an approved graduate diploma qualification and up to $18 000 towards an approved masters qualification.

So that speaks volumes about our investment into this sector, and the early childhood Aboriginal pathway scholarship is also available for Aboriginal people wanting to become an early childhood teacher. We need so many more Aboriginal teachers out there in general but also in the early childhood sector, and I want to do a little shout-out to Yappera, who are a great little kinder that I have had a lot to do with, and they do long day care as well, around preserving Aboriginal culture. I think they are based in Northcote. They do an amazing job, and there are many facilities like that across the state. Bubup Wilam, in the member for Thomastown’s electorate, do a fantastic job. I have got to say, these kinders, these early learning providers, do so much more for these kids than just teach. It is a holistic approach, it is about embedding culture and it is about keeping these kids connected to culture. So I am really pleased that these specific grants are available to entice young Aboriginal people, men and women, into early education. Some of them could get approved for up to $34 000 worth of grants for an undergraduate qualification, and again there is a sliding scale for graduate diplomas and masters qualifications.

So we are really taking this issue seriously in our rollout of three-year-old kinder and by investing in the workforce, investing in the policy and doing the coordination work that is required now so that there can be a continued rollout from this year into 2021, 2022 and beyond on a regional basis. We know over the next decade that this government’s investment, which is almost $5 billion to introduce this universal three-year-old kinder, is something that will pay dividends for generations to come.

I just wanted to do a little bit of a shout-out to some of the kinders in my own electorate who have been working extremely hard, particularly during this COVID period. Any families out there who had
to have their kinder-aged children at home for periods of five-days straight would know what a great job our early education teachers do, and I think their roles are even more appreciated now post the COVID lockdown. Of course some of these kinders have remained open and some of our early education providers within long day care have remained open, but we certainly know that some of my kinders have been doing it tough. I was really pleased to hear that they were successful in receiving some grants recently for kinders to be able to make sure that they were clean and ready for a hygienic return to term 2. So a shout-out to Taylors Lakes Kindergarten, Remus Way kinder, Sydenham Kindergarten, Copperfields Preschool, Barbary Crescent Preschool, Community Kids Haven Hillside, YMCA Taylors Hill Early Learning Centre and Taylors Hill outside-school-hours care as well.

Tomorrow, I am happy to say, I will be attending the preschool that has recently been built, and partially funded by our government, at Gilson College. For the first time at that college in my electorate we basically have three-year-olds that can be dropped off right through to year 12. It is making the families that attend this school so happy that they have a one-stop shop for preschool, primary school and high school for their bigger kids. I can tell you it is a wonderful school, and I am looking forward to being there tomorrow.

Finally, in summarising, can I just say what a wonderful commitment this is. Two years of high-quality, teacher-led kinder programs to improve the academic and long-term outcomes for children is seriously the best investment any government could make, and I am so proud that our government is leading the way yet again across the nation. I commend the motion to the house.

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (21:06): The first 1000 days are critical in defining what happens in your life. That is the assessment from one of our leading institutions, the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, but it is also the lived experience of my Irish mum, Bridie Brennan, from Boyle. She taught us all to read before we went to school, and she did that with the understanding that as a young girl she was taken out of school and had to be a farmer from a really young age and take care of her younger siblings. It is the classic eldest-daughter story that happened right through Europe during that time, and shows insight and maternal wisdom to make sure your children get a great start early in life. This really defines the social determinants of life: lifelong learning for skills, jobs and meaning, and then you look at the health aspects as well and how they are so important. Then the third part is how you connect the disconnected, and technology is a critical thing that we have now and a great tool to actually do that with. How do you use technology for the public good? These are issues that I am committed to pursuing—the social determinants of life—and I am delighted to be able to make a contribution in government.

The next issue we need to look at is place-based disadvantage. I want to acknowledge the minister at the table, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, for her commitment to suburban development and for giving me the opportunity to chair the revitalisation board in Broadmeadows. This is really important to actually draw a lot of these themes together. The minister grew up in Fawkner, just down the road, in a migrant family, and look at what she has achieved. It is this deep understanding about why this is important, this lived experience of how you need to bring these threads together. And that is what we have been able to do—to establish that it is critical that prosperity and opportunity be connected up and that talent is not defined by where you come from. This is a critical thing, but too often opportunity is.

I want to acknowledge the contribution from the member for Ivanhoe on this and how he talked about Heidelberg West and the long fight that he has had there to actually address these matters and to bring them to the fore. This is really what we need to do to assess where disadvantage is. We know the postcodes of disadvantage, so how do we turn them around and make them postcodes of hope? That is the whole strategy for how we bring these themes together. So where is your lifelong learning, your skills and your jobs, and how do you reinvest in these communities? If you look at three-year-old kindergarten, that is a critical point in this pathway to the future. It is about how you actually get to these children at this point, because if you follow what happens with children and their graduation, if they cannot read very well or they are not good at social interaction, they end up being put at the front
of the classroom, they end up then dropping down and they end up then getting into a whole pattern of social misbehaviour, and then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is really what is important about this initiative from the Andrews Labor government, and it fits within this bigger picture.

The member for Burwood gave an erudite exposition on the history of kindergartens. But it is really about the commitment to make it happen. That is the point of what the Andrews Labor government has done and delivered, and that is the critical investment for our future. Three-year-old kindergartens will result in the largest expansion of kindergarten infrastructure in Victoria’s history. It is estimated that the sector will need almost 1000 new or expanded kindergarten facilities. The government will be working alongside service providers to implement this nation-leading initiative. It is a fantastic investment. The government is working in partnership with all the sectors and services to build, expand and improve early years infrastructure and deliver an investment of almost 1000 new and expanded kindergarten facilities across the next decade.

What is necessary as well is the constancy of purpose, to be able to make sure over time that these key initiatives are delivered. The latest budget includes $473 million for early childhood infrastructure. This will support the sector to invest in new and expanded kindergarten facilities, particularly where they are needed most. That is what I am saying—going into these areas of disadvantage and actually saying, ‘Here’s how you get your hand up in life. Here’s how you get the key connector into education, to be able to get that love of learning, to be able to evolve, to be able to get a better chance in life’, and probably most importantly to deny that miser fate so that it does not matter where you are brought up.

We have got the Attorney-General here, the former Minister for Health. She totally understands the social determinants of health. I have had the privilege to work with the minister on these matters. It is how we bring them together and it is what the social infrastructure is: how you establish these hubs and how you connect out into the different parts of the community to bring together the neighbourhood houses, the kindergartens and the schools and how you actually show people that this is the way through and this is the way to a better opportunity in life. Particularly in the era we now live in, how we harness technology for good—there is so much about technology that we are still having to address.

We surrendered our privacy to social media, but how do we now harness that? How do we actually look at what is happening to these children as they go through these various stages? We know where the tipping points are and what is going to happen.

So this addresses inequality at a critical level, at a really important point. You can see what happens when kids get the chance and the difference that it makes for them. That is why this motion is important. That is why this initiative over a long period of time is vital to change these aspects. The department has continued to work on the assessment of early learning infrastructure and workforce to provide a comprehensive picture of the capacity of existing services to take on three-year-old enrolments.

Every kindergarten and long day care service in Victoria, and that is around 2700 in total, have been asked to take part in a survey about their existing capacity. This we should harness and connect up with the Generation Victoria project—the GenV project. This is another fantastic initiative—in the last state budget $173.5 million for medical research. This is going to be a world-leading survey of children from birth all the way through to look at how the health aspects work for the social determinants of life. That will be able to see their predispositions for everything from obesity to allergies and to really help at that level as well.

This is what Labor in power does best, to bring these things together, to coordinate and to actually make sure that people are included rather than excluded. This is the proposition on how we can harness technology in a new and better way. In the last term we put through a bill in this house to enable the various departments of government to talk and communicate better between each other, to break down the silo mentality and the turf wars and the institutional ego and all the other barriers so that we can actually, as I say, use technology for good. We have seen it used in some appalling ways, particularly politically, but that is a story for another time. But if we are looking at how we use the digital tools
that we now have, how you can directly connect and follow each individual, give them some benefit, stay with the families who might be in crisis or going through a really difficult time, give them the value and the hand up when they need it most, make sure that the schools are not just saying somebody would talk too much or whatever—we are actually analysing how we give them a better education and bringing all of that together. One of the key points is that it starts with three-year-old kindergarten.

I commend this motion to the house and the effort and commitment from the Andrews Labor government.

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Priority Precincts, Minister for the Coordination of Transport: COVID-19) (21:16): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until after consideration of message from Council in relation to the Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Bill 2019.

Bills

JUSTICE LEGISLATION MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS BILL 2019

Council’s amendments

The SPEAKER (21:16): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Bill 2019 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 9 insert—
   “(ca) to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to enable arrest warrants to be applied for and issued in further circumstances relating to witness summonses; and”.

2. Page 7, after line 25 insert the following heading—
   “Part 4A—Amendment of Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011”.

   NEW CLAUSES

3. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 7 and the heading proposed by amendment number 2—

   7A Definitions
   In section 3(1) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011—
   (a) for the definition of arrest warrant substitute—
   “arrest warrant means a warrant to arrest a person issued under—
   (a) section 139(2); or
   (b) section 141A(2); or
   (c) section 141B(2); or
   (d) section 141C(2); or
   (e) section 153(1);”;

   (b) insert the following definition—
   “audio visual link has the same meaning as in Part IIA of the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions Act) 1958.”.
7B Delegations
In section 32(5) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, for “and 139(1)” substitute “139(1), 141A(1), 141B(1) and 141C(1)”. 

7C Warrant to arrest witness who fails to appear
(1) In section 139(4) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, after “arrest warrant” insert “issued under this section”.
(2) In section 139(5) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, after “arrest warrant” insert “under this section”.

7D Bail for person arrested
In section 140(1) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, after “arrest warrant” insert “issued under section 139(2)”.

7E Person held in custody
In section 141(1) of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, after “arrest warrant” insert “issued under section 139(2)”.

7F New Divisions 2A and 2B inserted
After section 141 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 insert—

“Division 2A—Warrant to arrest for likely failure to comply with witness summons in certain circumstances

141A Warrant to arrest potential witness who has not yet been summoned
(1) The IBAC may apply to a Judge of the Supreme Court for the issue of a warrant to arrest a person, if—
(a) the IBAC has commenced an investigation under section 60; and
(b) as a result of the investigation, the IBAC suspects on reasonable grounds that conduct of the person constitutes corrupt conduct; and
(c) a witness summons has not been issued under section 120(1) in respect of the person; and
(d) the IBAC believes on reasonable grounds that—
(i) the person is about to leave, is making preparations to leave, or is likely to leave, the State; and
(ii) if a witness summons were issued under section 120(1), including a summons requiring immediate attendance under section 124(2), the person would be unlikely to attend before the IBAC, unless the person were arrested under an arrest warrant; and
(e) the person is 18 years of age or over.
(2) A Judge of the Supreme Court may issue an arrest warrant if satisfied by evidence on oath or affirmation that—
(a) there are reasonable grounds for—
(i) the suspicion under subsection (1)(b); and
(ii) the belief under subsection (1)(d); and
(b) the granting of an arrest warrant is reasonable having regard to—
(i) the evidentiary or intelligence value of the information, document or thing sought to be obtained from the person; and
(ii) the age of the person and any mental impairment to which the person is known or believed to be subject; and
(c) if the person were not arrested, any information, document or thing sought to be obtained from the person would be lost and could not reasonably be obtained from any other source.
141B  Warrant to arrest witness to whom a witness summons has been issued but not served

(1)  The IBAC may apply to a Judge of the Supreme Court for the issue of a warrant to arrest a person, if—

(a)  the IBAC has commenced an investigation under section 60; and

(b)  as a result of the investigation, the IBAC suspects on reasonable grounds that conduct of the person constitutes corrupt conduct; and

(c)  a witness summons has been issued under section 120(1) in respect of the person but not served; and

(d)  the IBAC believes on reasonable grounds that—

   (i)  the person is evading, attempting to evade, or likely to attempt to evade, service of the witness summons; and

   (ii)  the person is unlikely to attend before the IBAC in accordance with the witness summons, unless the person is arrested under an arrest warrant; and

(e)  the person is 18 years of age or over.

(2)  A Judge of the Supreme Court may issue an arrest warrant if satisfied by evidence on oath or affirmation that—

(a)  there are reasonable grounds for—

   (i)  the suspicion under subsection (1)(b); and

   (ii)  the belief under subsection (1)(d); and

(b)  the granting of an arrest warrant is reasonable having regard to—

   (i)  the evidentiary or intelligence value of the information, document or thing sought to be obtained from the person; and

   (ii)  the age of the person and any mental impairment to which the person is known or believed to be subject; and

(c)  if the person were not arrested, any information, document or thing sought to be obtained from the person would be lost and could not reasonably be obtained from any other source.

141C  Warrant to arrest witness to whom a witness summons has been issued and served

(1)  The IBAC may apply to a Judge of the Supreme Court for the issue of a warrant to arrest a person, if—

(a)  the IBAC has commenced an investigation under section 60; and

(b)  as a result of the investigation, the IBAC suspects on reasonable grounds that conduct of the person constitutes corrupt conduct; and

(c)  the person has been duly served with a witness summons issued under section 120(1); and

(d)  the IBAC believes on reasonable grounds that the person is unlikely to attend before the IBAC in accordance with the witness summons, unless the person is arrested under an arrest warrant; and

(e)  the person is 18 years of age or over.

(2)  A Judge of the Supreme Court may issue an arrest warrant if satisfied by evidence on oath or affirmation that—

(a)  there are reasonable grounds for—

   (i)  the suspicion under subsection (1)(b); and

   (ii)  the belief under subsection (1)(d); and

(b)  the granting of an arrest warrant is reasonable having regard to—

   (i)  the evidentiary or intelligence value of the information, document or thing sought to be obtained from the person; and

   (ii)  the age of the person and any mental impairment to which the person is known or believed to be subject; and
(c) if the person were not arrested, any information, document or thing sought to be
obtained from the person would be lost and could not reasonably be obtained from
any other source.

141D Matters relating to an arrest warrant issued under section 141A(2), 141B(2) or
141C(2)

(1) The rules to be observed with respect to warrants to arrest under the Magistrates' Court
Act 1989 (other than section 62 or 64(2), (3) or (4)) extend and apply to an arrest warrant
issued under section 141A(2), 141B(2) or 141C(2).

(2) A person arrested under an arrest warrant issued under section 141A(2) or 141B(2) must
be served with a witness summons issued under section 120(1) as soon as practicable
after the arrest.

(3) The issue of an arrest warrant under section 141A(2), 141B(2) or 141C(2), or the arrest
of a person under that warrant, does not relieve the person from any liability for non-
compliance with a witness summons duly served on the person before or after the arrest.

141E Arrest warrant under section 141A, 141B or 141C may be granted by telephone or
audio visual link in certain circumstances

(1) An application by the IBAC for an arrest warrant under section 141A(1), 141B(1) or
141C(1) may be made by telephone or audio visual link if the IBAC believes on
reasonable grounds that—
   (a) the application is urgent; and
   (b) the person to be named in the arrest warrant is about to leave the State.

(2) An application made by telephone or audio visual link for an arrest warrant must be
supported by—
   (a) an affidavit setting out the grounds for an arrest warrant under section 141A(1),
       141B(1) or 141C(1), as the case requires, and the grounds for the belief under
       subsection (1), that is—
       (i) sworn or affirmed; or
       (ii) if it is not reasonably practicable for the affidavit to be sworn or affirmed, a
            prepared copy of the affidavit that is not sworn or affirmed; or
   (b) if it is not reasonably practicable for an affidavit to be prepared, as much
       information as the Judge of the Supreme Court deciding the application considers
       is reasonably practicable in the circumstances, regarding—
       (i) the grounds for an arrest warrant under section 141A(1), 141B(1) or 141C(1),
           as the case requires; and
       (ii) the grounds for the belief under subsection (1).

(3) If the IBAC makes an application by telephone or audio visual link for an arrest warrant
that is supported by an affidavit (whether or not sworn or affirmed), the IBAC must
transmit by electronic communication a copy of the affidavit to the Judge of the Supreme
Court deciding the application.

(4) A Judge of the Supreme Court may issue an arrest warrant under section 141A(2),
141B(2) or 141C(2) on an application made by telephone or audio visual link if satisfied
that—
   (a) the grounds for issuing an arrest warrant under section 141A(2), 141B(2) or
       141C(2) are satisfied; and
   (b) there are reasonable grounds for the belief under subsection (1).

(5) If a Judge of the Supreme Court issues an arrest warrant under section 141A(2), 141B(2)
or 141C(2) on an application made by telephone or audio visual link, the Judge must—
   (a) inform the IBAC of the issue of the arrest warrant; and
   (b) if practicable, transmit by electronic communication a copy of the arrest warrant to
the IBAC.
(6) If it is not practicable to transmit by electronic communication a copy of the arrest warrant to the IBAC, the Judge may direct the IBAC to—
(a) complete a form of arrest warrant in the terms stated to the IBAC by the Judge of the Supreme Court and write on it the name of the Judge and the date on which and the time at which the arrest warrant was issued; and
(b) provide the form of arrest warrant completed by the IBAC to the Judge of the Supreme Court as soon as practicable.

(7) If the IBAC makes an application to a Judge of the Supreme Court by telephone or audio visual link for an arrest warrant, whether or not an arrest warrant is issued, the IBAC must provide to the Judge, not later than the day following the day on which the application was made, a sworn or affirmed affidavit setting out the grounds for the arrest warrant in the same terms stated by the IBAC under subsection (2).

(8) If an application under section 141A(1), 141B(1) or 141C(1) is made by telephone or audio visual link and the application is supported by a prepared affidavit specified in subsection (2)(a)(ii) or information specified in subsection (2)(b), a Judge of the Supreme Court may issue an arrest warrant under section 141A(2), 141B(2) or 141C(2) despite the evidence not being given under oath or affirmation.

141F Person arrested must be brought before the Supreme Court or Magistrates’ Court

(1) A person arrested under an arrest warrant issued under section 141A(2), 141B(2) or 141C(2) must be brought, as soon as practicable, before the Supreme Court or the Magistrates’ Court and the Supreme Court or the Magistrates’ Court (as the case requires) may—
(a) discharge the person from custody on bail in accordance with the Bail Act 1977 as if the person had been accused of an offence; or
(b) subject to subsection (2), order the continued detention of the person in a prison or police gaol, for the purpose of ensuring the person’s attendance before the IBAC, for a specified period not exceeding 24 hours or until the person is excused by the IBAC, whichever is earlier; or
(c) order that the person be discharged from custody unconditionally.

(2) The Supreme Court or the Magistrates’ Court must not make an order under subsection (1)(b) unless the Supreme Court or the Magistrates’ Court (as the case requires) is satisfied that—
(a) detention of the person is necessary for the purpose of ensuring the person’s attendance before the IBAC for the purposes of a witness summons issued under section 120(1); and
(b) the IBAC is taking all reasonable steps to schedule the attendance as soon as is practicable.

(3) If a person is detained in a prison in accordance with an order made under subsection (1)(b), the IBAC may give a written direction for the person to be delivered into the custody of a police officer for the purpose of bringing the person before the IBAC.

(4) If a person is detained in accordance with an order made under subsection (1)(b), the IBAC must, before the expiration of the period of detention specified in the order—
(a) release the person from custody unconditionally; or
(b) cause the person to be again brought before the Supreme Court or the Magistrates’ Court.

(5) If a person is brought before the Supreme Court or the Magistrates’ Court in accordance with subsection (4)(b), the Supreme Court or the Magistrates’ Court (as the case requires) may exercise any of the powers set out in subsection (1).

Note
A person discharged or released from custody unconditionally is not relieved from any obligation to comply with a witness summons requiring attendance at a later date.
Division 2B—General provisions in respect of arrest warrant issued under Division 2 or 2A

141G Person arrested under arrest warrant issued under Division 2 or 2A to be given opportunity to seek legal advice or legal representation

(1) Subject to section 127 and subsection (2), the IBAC is required to give a person arrested under an arrest warrant issued under Division 2 or 2A a reasonable opportunity to seek legal advice or obtain legal representation before the time specified for the person to attend before the IBAC in accordance with a witness summons issued under section 120(1).

(2) Despite section 127(6), if the IBAC gives a direction under section 127(2), the IBAC is not required to allow the person bound by the direction at least 3 days from the receipt of the direction to obtain legal advice or representation by another Australian legal practitioner before the person is required to attend before the IBAC in accordance with the witness summons issued under section 120(1).”.

7G Report to Victorian Inspectorate on issue of arrest warrant

In section 142 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, for “this Division” substitute “Division 2 or 2A”.

7H New Part 10 inserted

After section 198 of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 insert—

“Part 10—Transitional provisions

199 Transitional provision—Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2020

(1) The amendments made to this Act by the Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2020 apply to an investigation under section 60 of this Act on or after the commencement of the Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2020 regardless of whether the investigation commenced prior to that commencement.

(2) The IBAC may apply for an arrest warrant to be issued under section 141B(2) or 141C(2) in respect of a witness summons issued under section 120(1) prior to that commencement for the purposes of the investigation.”.

4. Long title, before “the Local” insert “the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011.”.

Ms HENNESSY (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety: COVID-19) (21:17): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I will be brief—I give that undertaking to those of us in the house. On the amendments, these are house amendments and what they do is they effectively provide IBAC with some additional arrest powers. Their genesis lies in some operational issues that IBAC have raised with the government. They effectively provide the ability for IBAC to arrest a person in circumstances where they may be intending to leave the jurisdiction before they have been charged or summoned to give evidence before IBAC. The government is satisfied that the particular protections that are also contained in this provision are sufficient as well.

Whilst we have attached this to the Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Bill 2019, because that was the most appropriate bill that we could, I do wish to note that the opposition are opposed to the justice legislation bill. But, in all fairness, I do wish to place on the record that the opposition would have brought an open mind to these specific amendments and understood the fact that this was just the most appropriate vehicle for us to move those amendments. So whilst the opposition and the government are not at one on the justice legislation bill, their opposition to the justice legislation bill would not ordinarily have captured an a priori opposition to the IBAC amendments.

Very briefly on the justice legislation bill as amended, I also just wish to acknowledge Mr Rod Barton in the other place who has brought a great passion and who has also, along with many others, sought to challenge some of the codswallop, the unfair imputations that have been made about people that
support this reform. I am very glad and very pleased, and I hope that this chamber, with their support, will ultimately back in the Productivity Commission, the Australian Law Reform Commission, the Victorian Law Reform Commission and those who very, very passionately every day advocate for improving access to justice, and that is what this bill will deliver. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (21:19): Whilst we have no issue with the amendment that has been sought by IBAC, we are obviously still opposed to the bill, but that is not what the issue is. But in regard to the amendment, as I said, we have no issue with that.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house’s decision.

Motions

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Debate resumed on motion of Ms KILKENNY:

That this house recognises the rollout of the Andrews Labor government’s landmark reforms that will see $5 billion invested over the next decade to deliver a full 15 hours of three-year-old kinder.

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Priority Precincts, Minister for the Coordination of Transport: COVID-19) (21:20): I am delighted to speak on this motion in the name of the member for Carrum. The policy of universal 15 hours of three-year-old kinder was a commitment made by the Andrews Labor government to the Victorian community at the 2018 election. I think it is absolutely crackingly good policy. It is an outstanding initiative that will bring so many benefits to the Victorian community in the short, medium and long term. I am very excited to have the opportunity to speak on the motion. I am even more excited to know already of the early success that we are seeing in the rollout of this policy.

This is a big and complex task. Rolling out universal 15 hours of three-year-old kinder to all three-year-old children across Victoria, whether they are in the smallest rural community, in the centre of Melbourne or in the suburbs and regional centres, is a big and complicated task. The Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and the member for Carrum, who are leading this work, are already driving this reform very, very hard.

I know many members have spoken already of the huge educational benefits that come, and there are truckloads of research—huge amounts of evidence—that demonstrate that the earlier you can provide structured, formal, early childhood education, the better start those young children get in life. It does not matter which background they come from, but obviously it has a particular impact on children from disadvantaged communities and families. It has such a big impact on their ability to participate in education for the rest of their life and then go on and be productive members of our community and the economy. As I said, there is so much research that backs this up. Study after study just demonstrates the long-term benefits that come from having that extra year of kinder. It does not sound like much—one extra year of three-year-old kinder, 15 hours a week—but it does make such a big impact on young people’s results in both education and lifelong workforce participation.

On the issue of workforce participation, that is the other great benefit from this policy. It is not just an education outcome, as critically important as that education outcome is. This is also a great policy that supports women’s greater participation in the workforce. That is the other reason why I think this is a cracking good policy, because it supports more women. It gives women and families more choice about how women can return to the workforce. We know that despite the tremendous gains that have been made in the number of women entering the workforce in different and diverse fields, we have still got a long way to go.
One of the great barriers to women entering the workforce, being able to stay in the workforce, being able to participate in the workforce equally and being able to advance their career on a similar trajectory as men is being able to give them more support in their caring responsibilities. Whether they are caring for young children or their older parents, we know that women continue to bear the greater level of responsibility in that really important role. I know in talking to so many families about this policy in my own community that that is what people are also excited about, not just the chance to give their children another year of education but also the chance for women to think about how they might be able to return to the workforce and how they might be able to add to their family income, get back into the workforce and advance their career. This will bring big economic gains in terms of increasing the opportunity for women to participate in the workforce, alongside those big lifelong education outcomes that come for the young people in three-year-old kinder.

There is also the other economic outcome that will be driven through this policy. I should note that the government is investing $5 billion in the rollout of this initiative. The other big benefit is that it is a job-generating policy as well. There is the significant number of additional kindergarten teachers and staff that need to be employed in the rollout of universal three-year-old kinder across the state. There is also the need to upgrade and build new kindergarten facilities, so there are additional jobs in the construction sector and that will add to our economic prosperity in Victoria as well.

I also want to touch on another key feature of the rollout of this policy, and that is the fact that the Andrews Labor government has prioritised some of our smallest rural communities first in the rollout of three-year-old kinder. We prioritised rural local government areas for three-year-old kinder because we are progressively rolling this out. I did indicate at the outset that this is big and complex and important reform, and we need to do it progressively. As part of that progressive rollout we are starting with rural local government areas.

I am very excited to know that from next year Loddon shire, which partly sits in my electorate, is going to be part of the next tranche of 15 local government areas that build on the six local government areas that have been rolled out in 2020. I know from speaking to young families in Dingee, a small community in my electorate, that they are very excited. They are very excited about what this means to have more education opportunities in that town, in that rural community, in places like Dingee and Serpentine. They are farming communities. It gives women in those communities an opportunity, as I said before, to participate in the workforce. It gives their children better access to education. I know communities like that. It has been replicated right across a whole range of rural shires. As I said, we have prioritised deliberately rural local government areas first, recognising that they do face some of the biggest areas of disadvantage in access to education, access to employment opportunities, and they are going to be great beneficiaries from being prioritised in the rollout of this program.

Also it is going to support so many other great programs we see in our early childhood area, and it will support some of those great initiatives that I see in kindergartens in my own electorate. There are initiatives like bush kinder. I am very familiar with two kindergartens in my electorate, the Spring Gully kindergarten and the Huntly kindergarten. They run bush kinder programs, an opportunity where, for one of the days that children go to kinder, their education is conducted in the bush. Also what comes with being in that outdoors environment is a very strong emphasis on Indigenous education. I know that my now six-year-old son participated in the bush kinder program at Spring Gully Primary School. What he learned and the breadth of information that he now has about our Indigenous community, about learning in the outdoors, has just been a tremendous experience for him and has certainly assisted him with his transition into primary school.

I also know a number of members touched on how this will particularly support children from disadvantaged families. In my electorate of Bendigo East and in the broader Bendigo community we do have many areas of disadvantage—entrenched disadvantage. So again, the universal nature of the rollout of this program means that all of those children from those families and those communities are going to get that equal opportunity to get an extra year of education, an extra year of learning. As I said at the outset, that extra year of learning will give them better lifelong education outcomes, the ability to
earn more in the workforce when they do enter the workforce, and the ability to stay at school longer. All of those things bring great personal benefits in terms of outcomes. It brings great benefits, but also as I have touched on previously, great broader benefits to the economy from having these young people, when they do enter the workforce, be productive members of our community and the economy.

This is, as I said at the outset, wonderful policy. It is something that I have been very excited to support through the many stages of policy development, and I was so thrilled that when we were able to announce this as part of the 2018 state election it received such tremendous support from families, from the early childhood education sector, from communities and obviously from the Victorian community more broadly. There is a lot still to be done ahead as we progressively roll this out over a number of years—as we build each year, year on year. We have to physically build the facilities, train the workforce to the numbers that we need, roll out the early childhood opportunities. It is going to bring so many benefits for decades and decades to come, and we are just at the very start of this rollout. It will be very exciting to see those benefits come over many years and decades ahead. I commend the motion to the house.

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (21:30): I am very pleased to be speaking on this motion. It has been quite some time since I was a three-year-old, and I certainly did not have the benefit of three-year-old kindergarten. It has caused me to think a little bit about my own early education. I remember when I was just maybe a year or two older than three—in the preps—we were all encouraged to sing. It was said to us that if we sang well and with intensity and concentration, the statue that was in our room would move—if we sang well, we would see the statue move. So off we went, and the first verse was sung. The person running the class said, ‘Hands up those who saw the statue move’. Well, I certainly was not going to move my hands at all, but a few crawlers’ and sycophants’ hands went up—just a very small group, mind you. The teacher said, ‘Well, look, we will have another go at this’. So we sang again. She said, ‘You know if you really concentrate, you will see that statue move’. And away we went. Once again we were asked, and this time more hands went up. But I can tell you, mine did not. I just thought, ‘This is ridiculous; I haven’t seen the statue move’. So we were asked to do the third verse, and off we went. I have to confess—and this is the first time I have ever confessed this—the third time around, I put my hand up. And some would say that perhaps typified the rest of my life; I do not know. But it was a strange way of teaching things then, in a way. It is good to see that we have come a long way in those early childhood education experiences.

Going forward a number of years, I look at the way we brought up our daughter and son. We were, I suppose, very relaxed, and hopefully they acquired good values and what have you from us. However, I notice now with my own daughter and her daughter—my granddaughter—that I think to myself, ‘My wife and I were as slack as slack’. When I look at the unbelievable business that now goes into the education of a three-year-old or a seven-month-old and what have you and so forth, I understand that and I do see that. We are told, ‘She must have her two sleeps’, and, ‘This must happen, and this must happen’, et cetera and so forth.

Sometimes you can stand back and think a bit cynically about all these things and think, you know, ‘Well, is it really necessary?’ But this brings me then to three-year-old kindergarten. I think that I was reading that around 90 per cent of brain development occurs before the age of five, including critical cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development. And we know about language acquisition and motor skills. We have seen in countries like Finland and Korea the benefits that have accrued not just in that age group but in times thereafter. It was a bit hit and miss in my time and perhaps even in my child rearing, but in more recent times I think more research has been done and data has been collected, and this is something that is really, really worthwhile. It is undisputed data that we have.

There are a couple of other things that I would just like to mention along the way, if I could. One is the notion of establishing kindergartens on school sites. Now, that does not sound particularly special. It is certainly very convenient in terms of a one-stop shop and so on. But I think what is really important for children—I am just speaking now as an educator, as a former principal and so on—is learning not just in a horizontal way of just one age group only, and that is inevitable when you are talking about...
three-year-old kinder of course and understandable, but in that sense of recognising that you are part of an age group. When you go to three-year-old kinder and you are in a primary school of children aged up to 12 years of age, that can be a very important thing. It is a kind of incidental learning if you like. It is an incidental form of socialisation and so on. So when I was reading about that I thought, well, I have seen secondary schools—one that I was a principal of—where we brought along this whole vertical system so a kid in year 7 could see what happens to people in year 12, and so on and so forth. Well, it is the same way here; I think it is very good that three-year-old kinder is not isolated from the rest of the world. I certainly do not think it is, but I just think having it on the same site is a very good thing.

I can certainly report, in visiting kindergartens myself in the Hawthorn electorate, the wonderful experience that one finds. If you visit secondary schools, they are happy enough to see you, but they do not show any excitement, whereas if you go into a kindergarten, they are absolutely enthusiastic, particularly if you are prepared to sit and read a book to them and so on. So it has been a joy for me in this job of just 18 months to include the visiting of kindergartens. When I go there I am just amazed at the level of confidence that is often shown by the boys and girls there, the way they have been taught to interrelate, that it is not just survival of the fittest and that you actually learn to listen and to hear people. People often say, ‘You’re not listening’. Well, I think you are listening if you can repeat what a person has said. If you can repeat the reasons for their argument and so on, that is listening—it does not mean you have to agree—and I have seen that demonstrated in the kindergartens that I have been privileged to visit. So I have been delighted by that experience. It means quite a lot to me to see the figures that have been presented there. The government is investing $5 billion over the full rollout this decade, and I think that is just fantastic. This is not something where you think, ‘Well, with a lick and a promise, I hope it turns out’.

The other thing about it, too, is that, as it often occurred to me years ago, when you go to school you have an opportunity for a little bit of a fresh start. There is a bit of an image about you within the family situation. You might be seen as always whingeing or lazy or whatever it might be, and in a way schooling—and I would extend this to three-year-old kinder—is an opportunity for you to move away from Mum and Dad and maybe look at opportunities to bring out a different light and so on. So that wonderful opportunity that you have in the best schools and in kindergartens is to balance home life and home values with an experience of interaction with children in a kind of benignly and professionally controlled atmosphere. So it is not something that necessarily we will see an immediate return for economically—it will not hit the stock market or anything like that—but I think you will recognise it. You cannot define a rhinoceros, but if you come across one in the jungle, you will recognise it, and it is the same sort of thing. You might not be able to define what has gone on there, but I think in the interpersonal relationships and what have you, you will see that they will be developed. So I am very pleased to commend the motion.

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (21:40): It gives me great pleasure to rise and to speak to the motion as well. I note this is actually the second time this sitting week that I have had the pleasure of speaking about universal three-year-old kinder as I made a contribution earlier this week in speaking to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the budget estimates for 2019–20.

It is so great to hear my government colleagues speaking with such passion about three-year-old kinder and especially about their experiences, whether that be historically, which the member for Burwood took us through, or the origins of kindergarden and that unforgettable Swedish name of Mr Pestalozzi, I think it was. We also had the member for Hawthorn, who took us through his recent historical experiences, and we even had the member for Ivanhoe speaking about his experiences in being able to get kinder in what is now his electorate.

But the government is delivering the biggest reform in the history of early childhood education in Victoria to provide all three-year-old children access to subsidised kinder. It is an extra 5 hours initially and over the course of a decade will expand to a full 15 hours per week. This investment gives children access to two years of subsidised kinder programs delivered by a teacher before starting school. It is
part of a $4.1 billion investment in education from kinders and schools right through to higher education and to TAFE as well. The program will fundamentally transform early childhood education and help families, especially families who are struggling with the cost of living. It will save some of Victoria’s most disadvantaged families around $5000 a year. In total we are looking at about 90 000 students per year that this will affect.

In fact the Victorian government has committed almost $5 billion over 10 years so that every child in the state will have access to a kinder program for three-year-olds. As I have said previously, that is an extra year of play-based learning led by a teacher which will be added to Victorian children’s education. But it does not end there, as the budget includes some $473 million for early childhood infrastructure as well, which will support the sector to invest in new and expanded kinder facilities when and where they are needed most. It invests $92.4 million to support early childhood teachers and educators through more professional development, mentoring and scholarships so children can continue to have access to highly trained teachers. If I have some time, I will delve into that a little bit more deeply later.

The rollout of three-year-old kinder prioritises regional Victoria as well, and this is a tremendous thing. It in fact started in January of this year in the local government areas of Buloke, Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians, South Gippsland, Strathbogie and Yarriambiack. That will expand to a further 15 regional local government areas from next year. It will then continue to roll out across the state progressively. At this point I would like to particularly give a shout-out to some of the kinders in my electorate that will no doubt be looking forward to that initial extra 5 hours per week, scaling up to 15 hours per week. All of these kinders I have been to, and I know they will be looking forward to this. We have Brentwood Park Berwick Kindergarten, Regans Road Kindergarten, Hampton Park East Kindergarten, Coral Drive kindergarten, Gwendoline Kindergarten, Strathaird kindergarten, Strong Drive kindergarten and Hillsmeade Early Learning Centre. They are just a handful, some eight, out of the total 47 kinders and early childhood learning centres in my electorate.

As has been said tonight, we know that development in children comes through active and properly engaged playtime, and the three-year-old kinder program invests very heavily, socially and economically, in three main things: firstly, it invests in our youngest Victorians; secondly, it invests in their educators; and thirdly, it invests in the infrastructure around them.

So why is three-year-old kinder so important? Well, research, as I said, has shown that play-based learning is a powerful way to support children’s development and the benefits last into the school years and beyond. The evidence shows that two years is simply better than one when it comes to early learning. The quality kindergarten program will have a more positive impact for children who start at an earlier age, and the benefits are greater particularly for children who are in vulnerable circumstances. Young children learn through play, and this program will give children the opportunity to use their imagination and practise important skills; it will help their social and their emotional development.

As I said, there is also investment in our childhood educators, and the government has committed $92.4 million over five years to support the early childhood education workforce, including through the expanded early childhood scholarships and incentives program. This means that financial support will be available in the form of early childhood scholarships, supporting people commencing their studies, upskilling or already studying early childhood teaching.

There is also investment, of course, through our TAFE program. There are new free TAFE courses, and this year two courses to train people to become early childhood educators were added to the free TAFE course list. The certificate III in early childhood education and care and the diploma of early childhood education and care are now available tuition fee-free for those eligible students. In addition, the Victorian government has committed $92.4 million, as someone said, over five years to support the early childhood education workforce, including financial support for people to study to become degree-qualified early childhood teachers.
Thirdly, as I said, there is investing in jobs and the building of infrastructure. We will see benefits in co-located kindergartens, and the building of those facilities on or next to school sites provides many benefits for families as well as providing so many jobs. In terms of the benefits for families, it makes kinder programs easier to access, makes drop-off times simpler and more convenient and makes transition from kindergarten programs much smoother for children who are actually all on the same campus. So having these co-located of course makes it much easier. In terms of the building process, each new kinder facility being put on an existing school site will be built to ensure the best educational outcomes for children, making sure that they get the most out of their early learning.

The Victorian government proudly co-invests with councils to provide kindergarten facilities, and these facilities can also offer a range of other community services such as maternal and child health, adult education and playgroups as well. The three-year-old kindergarten program is a signature social policy reform of the Andrews Labor government. As I have already said, it is investing $5 billion in the full rollout over the course of the next 10 years. It is a wonderful program that will mean much more investment in our youngest Victorians, and I commend the motion to the house.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (21:50): It is a pleasure to speak on the motion moved by the member for Carrum, and I want to thank the member speaking to the motion for her passion on this issue. I also want to acknowledge all previous contributions by many of our members. Three-year-old kindergarten is a signature social policy reform of the Andrews Labor government. By pushing forward with this reform Victoria is leading the nation in early childhood education and building the Education State. Clearly international studies consistently show long-term benefits for children who attend two years of kindergarten over a single year of attendance. Two years of a high-quality, teacher-led kindergarten program have been shown to improve academic and long-term life outcomes for children.

A central tenet of this reform is that providing children with quality early childhood education will set them up for healthy, happy, fulfilling lives and successful lifelong learning. Universal rather than targeted kindergarten will better support all children, especially those who have experienced the most disadvantage. This reform has the potential not only to change the trajectory of children’s lives but also to affect broader positive change at a populational level. It will create jobs through two principal means: additional early childhood teachers and educators and jobs created as a result of infrastructure investment. And those jobs will be local jobs, which will be extremely important after the COVID pandemic.

The government commitment to universal three-year-old kindergarten is a game changer. The benefits will be felt for generations to come. At full rollout by 2029, three-year-old children across the state will have access to 15 hours of a subsidised kindergarten program every week for 40 weeks each year. Potentially around 90,000 children could benefit from this reform each year, and that is amazing. We begin that work with $881.6 million to deliver two years of quality subsidised kindergarten to all Victorian three-year-olds. From this year up to 15 hours of a kindergarten program for three-year-olds will be introduced in six local government areas; they are South Gippsland, Buloke, Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians, Strathbogie and Yarriambiack. In 2021 we will introduce three-year-old kindergarten in another 15 government areas, and they are Alpine, Ararat, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Colac Otway, Corangamite, East Gippsland, Glenelg, Hepburn, Indigo, Loddon, Murrindindi, Southern Grampians, Towong and West Wimmera.

The achievements over the last six months are constructing nine new state-of-the-art modular kindergarten buildings, allowing us to be responsive where there is the greatest demand, launching the Building Blocks infrastructure strategy and grants program and making strides with the statewide assessment of every kindergarten and long day care facility regarding their existing capacity, with visits to more than 80 per cent of Victoria’s 2700 kindergarten services having been completed on schedule.

And for the workforce, as of June this year 1000 offers of financial support will go to eligible students studying an early childhood teaching qualification. We have also funded 250 kindergarten service
providers with grants to help support almost 600 provisionally registered teachers achieve full registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. We have established early childhood professional practice partnerships between four universities and early childhood service providers that deliver a kindergarten program to enable leading practice in initial teacher education. This means the creation of more than 4000 new early childhood teacher jobs and 2000 new educator jobs by 2029. More people are needed to train to become early childhood teachers and educators to meet the growing demand.

Along with this we have provided new free TAFE courses. This year two courses to train people to become early childhood educators were added to the free TAFE course list. Certificate III in early childhood education and care and the diploma of early childhood education and care are now available tuition fee-free for eligible students. And of course there is financial support to study and work in early childhood. In addition the Victorian government has committed $92.4 million over five years to support the early childhood education workforce, which includes financial support for people to study to become degree-qualified early childhood teachers. Every early childhood job has one thing in common: the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children and their families.

Of course there is infrastructure: three-year-old kindergarten will result in the largest expansion of kindergarten infrastructure in the state’s history. It is estimated that the sector will need almost 1000 new or expanded kindergarten facilities. We are working in partnership with all sectors and services to build, expand and improve early years infrastructure across the board. To deliver this monumental commitment we will be investing in almost 1000 new and expanded kindergarten facilities across the next decade. The latest budget included $473.2 million for early childhood infrastructure. That included $283 million in capital funding to support increased capacity to deliver kindergarten programs for three-year-olds; $156.6 million to be provided in the form of infrastructure grants, funding in partnership with the sector through a co-contribution model; and $33.6 million to be invested in the children’s facilities capital program to build, upgrade and improve existing early years facilities.

Every new Victorian primary school set to open from 2021 will have a kindergarten onsite or next door, reducing the burden on parents and helping to build the Education State. Ten primary schools set to open in 2021 and all six opening in 2022 will have a kindergarten either onsite or next-door. I know in my electorate down at the Eynesbury Station primary school, which is currently under construction and which is down in quite an isolated area of the Melton electorate—it’s first and only school, the primary school—is also having an early learning centre constructed. I was to go out and do a sod-turning event back on 25 March this year for the early learning centre and unfortunately due to the COVID pandemic that event was cancelled, but that early learning centre is well under construction now and I am pleased to say it will be ready for the 2021 school year.

The benefits of co-located kinders: building co-located kindergarten facilities on or next to school sites provides many benefits for Victorian families, including making kindergarten programs easier to access, drop-off time simpler and more convenient and transitions from kindergarten programs to school smoother for children. Having kindergarten facilities and schools on the same site also helps create a hub that benefits the whole community. The Eynesbury Station primary school and early learning centre is a prime example of that. As I say, it is down in quite an isolated area away from the main area of the Melton electorate.

Young children learn about the world through play. It gives children the opportunity to use their imagination and practise important skills. It also helps their social and emotional development and wellbeing. In a kindergarten program children use play to build their language skills and learn about numbers and patterns. They learn how to get along with others, to share, to listen and to manage their emotions. Teachers and educators help children become curious, creative and confident about learning.

I have previously stated here that we are the Education State, and of course we on this side of the house well know that education does not just start when we dress our kids up in their uniforms on their first day of school to start prep. We know that an early childhood education is essential to give every child
the best start they need in their education journey. This is important for all children but of course particularly important in our diverse multicultural community of Victoria. Giving children from migrant and refugee families like the many families in my electorate of Melton a quality early childhood education helps those children have the best start in preparation for their primary school education and beyond. It can also help their parents and caregivers connect and be part of their wider community. Often in a preschool or childcare environment parents of many cultures interact with others as their children form friendships and connections that cross cultural barriers. Parents who were born in the Sudan talk and interact with another parent whose family trace their heritage in Australia back a number of generations at a birthday party of their children’s friend whose parents emigrated from Vietnam. The first steps of truly multicultural societies come from understanding others, the seeds of which are often sown when our children start in early education.

One of the great events that I attended last year was the opening of the extension of the Al Iman College kindergarten. It was a fantastic event. They made us all very welcome and they were so pleased with the extension of that kindergarten, and their ambition is to grow the population in that kindergarten. I have many early learning centres in my electorate, and I commend this motion to the house.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (22:00): I am delighted to be able to stand and speak to this incredibly important motion that has been put by the member for Carrum—and how lucky we are to have a colleague on this side of the chamber of the quality of the member for Carrum. Her role as an early childhood educator is something that inspires us all. Early childhood education is something that is important to certainly all of us on this side of the chamber. Early childhood education, or kindergarten, was incredibly formative for me and is important in the role it plays in developing our children, but actually in this case I would like to talk about the impact on parents, on mothers, and the way that a really strong kindergarten community can be an opportunity for us to form friendships and to become a part of a community.

In Cranbourne, like in so many places, but particularly perhaps like Melton, we have a very young community, and it is a very optimistic community. Lots of people arrive in Cranbourne with very young families, but it is actually also a place where many people arrive not long after becoming citizens or even residents of Australia. So for many people actually having the joy of being part of something, being connected to each other, is one of the benefits that is sometimes overlooked. When people arrive from other countries and they bring their children to kinder, that can be the first step they have towards recognising the importance of their children’s education and forming those friendships. So I would like to take this unusual opportunity late in the evening to talk about some of the benefits I experienced from my many years involved in a kinder committee when my children were young.

We are going back a long time—perhaps not as far back as the member for Hawthorn took us in his earlier terrific contribution, nor in fact the contribution from the member for Burwood, who gave us an extraordinary history lesson actually on the origins of the kindergarten. But for me it is a journey that takes me back to when my oldest child was in kindergarten. I was blessed to be surrounded by the friendship of some terrific women, Fiona Arthurson and Denise McCluskey, who were the sort of women that made me feel better about my role as a parent. Reflecting on so many people who arrive in a country for the first time, I know that the friendship I formed with Beth Barclay, who herself had not long arrived in Australia, and the ability that she had to form community around kindergarten were things that I to this day—many, many years later—feel so fortunate to have experienced. I was lucky to find myself shoulder to shoulder with Janine Callinan and Leanne Kanduff—again, giving me those skills that I needed as a parent to be able to take on roles on the kinder committee and perhaps, like the member for Mount Waverley, learn a little bit about politics, making sure that we kept the president happy. I was very engaged in making sure that the other families were able to feel connected as well. Of course kindergartens form the strong basis for our communities to watch and join as part of the role that kindergartens have as places of education.
This motion is brought to us by the member for Carrum, who I was very fortunate to have come and visit Cranbourne a couple of times to visit kindergartens. One of her undertakings was to sell the advantage of taking on a career as an early childhood educator, and she did that with what we all know to be that passion and insight that is, if not peculiar to the member for Carrum, something that is certainly deeply embedded in her way of operating. I was very pleased when a good, strong community member, one of our South Sudanese community leaders, Deng Kor, and Kenyatta, Elizabeth Yoa and Tut Yoa came to meet with us to hear a little bit more about what opportunities there are for members of the community to take on that role of early childhood education. We know that with free TAFE, that is an opportunity that has been opened up to so many more.

The member for Carrum, with the motion that she has got here before us and in the deep policy work she does and in the way that she expresses the importance of having two years of education, has been a feature of the Cranbourne community. She is in a neighbouring electorate, so I have been fortunate to have had that opportunity many, many times. Of course the role that early childhood education has in Cranbourne is so important. It is heartbreaking when people are unable to give children the quality education that they want to. I know that to see parents sometimes take on the stress of an additional job to be able to pay for their children to go to three-year-old kinder is heartbreaking, and to know that perhaps other children in the street or their neighbours’ children were able to have the opportunity to have access to three-year-old kinder while their own children were not is something that is difficult for any parent, perhaps particularly for parents who put such high stock in education and have such a high regard for giving their kids the opportunities that they perhaps missed out on.

I was very pleased as a member of Parliament to be able to talk to people in Cranbourne about what this policy change will mean for them. It does give me pleasure to recognise some of the great educators of Cranbourne here this evening and to be able to thank and acknowledge Kirsten Sanema, Hayley Wilkinson, Bree Eastburn, Jenna Barton and Margaret Duffy. I know I am very proud of the work that the Andrews Labor government is undertaking in making sure that we can look after the future of our youngest Victorians. But it is not just about the children, it is about the educators as well. We know when educators are happy and engaged and have been given the advantage of a strong foundation in understanding children’s development and play-based learning, the benefits are going to be felt for generations. When I think about the young children who are going into three-year-old kinder now, what a difference it will make in 15 years when they are reaching adulthood. It will be a profound intergenerational benefit that comes through the investment, recognising that we are investing almost $5 billion over 10 years so that children across the state can have access to two years of funded kindergarten programs.

Due to the scale of this reform we will implement this in stages, and we are going to ensure that children are learning in quality environments from quality teachers. It ought not matter where they live. Of course we are rolling out this program in some of our rural and regional parts of Victoria, and we know that the social skills that will be taught to children that they will be able to benefit from will have extraordinary effects over many years, but especially in those early years of education. As children start school they will already have self-awareness. They will be able to understand the importance of respecting each other and respecting others. The research is crystal clear—the science is crystal clear—that the emotional skills children learn from two years of funded kindergarten are going to have profound effects on their ability to adapt to an education setting. Their language, literacy and numeracy skills, their ability to sit and hear a story and to count objects—these are the things that will make us proud when we reflect back on the reforms, reflect back on the legacy, that will have been left. I commend the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Education, for having the courage to make a reform when he probably will not be here to see that benefit in 15 years—or maybe he will—and to have the courage and the instincts to follow this through. I commend this motion.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (22:10): I also rise to speak on the motion presented by the member for Carrum, and I do want to start by thanking the whip, because it was a fantastic piece of scheduling in that she allowed me to come and make my contribution after the conclusion of tonight’s AFL match.
There would not be too many times where this chamber of Parliament has sat at the same time as an AFL match, but it has been a great piece of scheduling that has allowed me to do that.

This motion is about the early childhood investment that this government has made, and it is a really significant contribution. The mainstay of it obviously is the $5 billion over 10 years, which will invest in universal three-year-old kinder. Before I get into some of those details I do want to also give a big vote of thanks to all our early childhood educators, particularly in the Box Hill community but also throughout Victoria. I think we only needed to see through COVID-19 how education was considered an essential industry. I think sometimes it is too easy for us to take for granted what the teaching profession do, both at the early childhood stage and at the primary and secondary school stages. We as a community might take it for granted, but I think that the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes that we were forced to make have really demonstrated how much work they actually do for all of us.

I received quite a bit of correspondence from early childhood educators who had concerns about continuing their work and their role through the pandemic, and I really want to thank them for their effort and their diligence in continuing throughout the pandemic to provide the service that so many parents relied on. Obviously it is very difficult to provide remote learning for children who are three- and four-year-olds. Having a four-year-old myself I understood how difficult that was, trying to entertain them through that period. It really gave me an even greater sense of the value of what the early childhood educators are providing.

I do want to particularly call out some of the early childhood service providers in our area which really demonstrate some of the work that the Andrews government is doing on early childhood education. One particular provider is the Box Hill North Primary School Kindergarten. As the name suggests, the kindergarten is co-located with the primary school, and it has been co-located at the primary school for almost a quarter of a century. So the decision by the school community at that time was really a forerunner of what the government policy is today, and it really demonstrates what the advantages are of co-locating a primary school with a kinder.

As I know myself, because my children also go to a co-located school and kinder, one of the biggest advantages is for the parents in being able to have a single co-located drop-off for the kinder children as well as for the school children. But it is more than that; it also enables the kinder children to be able to transition to the school environment much more seamlessly. They are already prepared for that environment. It is a gradual transition. They are not just coming into prep from a completely different environment. They know the school environs. They know people who are there. They probably have their brothers and sisters there. I know with my own son in kinder, he always likes to go to the fence and shout out his older brother’s name, who is in the primary school playground. They keep the kinder and the school playgrounds separate, but he is always out there looking for his older big brother. Being able to go there and go to the school and having that environment just makes it so much easier for the youngest children to make that transition into kinder.

As has been mentioned by a number of other speakers, the education and the learning that goes on at kinder is so critical to the later years. This is true as a general rule. Extra hours spent in an early childhood environment learning and playing and developing those skills makes so much of a difference in terms of the education standards as those students progress through primary school and through secondary school.

An even greater contribution can be made in some of the schools where a language is added to the early childhood program. I will call out the Box Hill North Primary School kinder again because it was about 13 or 14 months ago that I had the pleasure of going to the school and to the kinder with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education to launch the government’s early childhood language program. The school has a Japanese language program that has been running for many years from prep to grade 6, and now they have introduced that program into their four-year-old kinder. It was just so fantastic to see these four-year-old children singing songs in Japanese, saying words, making vocabulary in Japanese and pointing to various objects in Japanese. The brain at three years old and
four years old is so flexible and malleable. They are just like sponges—they can absorb so much, and learning another language really stretches the brain and enables those kids to learn at such a great rate.

I also wanted to particularly single out another early childhood centre in the Box Hill electorate, and that is the Pope Road Kindergarten. Last year Leanne Mits, who is an early childhood educator at the Pope Road Kindergarten in Blackburn, received the Early Childhood Teacher of the Year Award. This was an award recognising her achievements across the entire state. She received the award for her commitment to connecting children with the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and her work in developing the Pope Road kinder reconciliation action plan. I did go out and meet with Leanne at the kinder and meet with the children, and her passion for early childhood education is amazing. She is so passionate about not just her work but making sure that the children in the kindergarten understand Indigenous history, what it means to live in Australia and the history and the culture of Australia—what made it what it is today.

As I mentioned, as a parent who has children who have gone through the kinder program and are still going through the kinder program, it is just such a valuable tool that sets them up for the rest of their life, so I fully commend this motion to the house.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (22:20): It is with some pleasure tonight that I rise to speak on this education motion moved by the member for Carrum. In reflecting on the motion I really reflected on my own particular experience. I have been fortunate to be a member of Parliament and a local government councillor over a long time, since 1999, and I must say I have always been surprised in a very pleasing way the times I have been able to go and visit kindergartens and actually see firsthand the inspiring work undertaken by kinder teachers. I certainly, like I know many from the Andrews government do, would like to acknowledge the fantastic kinder teachers throughout my community.

South Barwon of course is a seat that is located on the edge of Geelong and the Surf Coast, and as a seat it is growing very, very rapidly. We have some 57 000 adults on the electoral roll. It is Australia’s fastest growing regional community. As a consequence of that I am sure no-one in this place would be surprised that many first and second home buyers are moving into my community. Not unsurprisingly they are choosing to make South Barwon their home and they are choosing to start that journey of having a family. As a consequence of that I look forward to this investment that the Andrews Labor government is making, because I know as the father of Isaac and Noah how important kindergarten education was to them. In particular I think in the case of my younger child kindergarten was tremendously important for giving him the necessary skills to be able to ultimately go to primary school and get the best out of his primary schooling.

Kindergartens from my observation and experience always have parents committees made up of passionate people who wish to see the very, very best service delivered by their kindergartens, and of course they very, very much want to see the teachers being given the necessary tools to be able to deliver a fantastic education. I certainly would like to, as many in this place have, acknowledge those fantastic volunteer committees who have made such an outstanding difference to many, many generations.

I have listened very, very intently to quite a number of the contributions. I listened very carefully to the previous contribution, particularly around three- and four- and five-year-olds, that sort of age cohort that are accessing three- and four-year-old kinder, in terms of how rapidly those little humans grow and how rapidly their brains develop through that period. I know when my children went through kinder there was an absolute profound change in both of them—the capacity to interact, the capacity to sit quietly and listen, the capacity to do a raft of different things that are so fundamental and critical to them developing the necessary set of skills to be able to navigate primary school. I noticed in my own children the difference.

The reality is of course, though, that not every child has the same opportunities. I listened very, very intently to the contribution made by the member for Cranbourne, and I reflected on what she had to
say in the debate on this motion, particularly around new migrant families who are moving to her community and who are making the Cranbourne community their home. Often those families come from different parts of the globe, and those countries that they come from reflect on and have different educational structures. I very much appreciated her contribution about what kindergarten means for those kids from those communities not only in terms of the education and the opportunities that it sets those kids up for but also importantly the way in which those new communities can be brought together for the express purpose of educating their communities. I have certainly seen throughout the Geelong community in new communities that have moved to Australia the important role that kindergarten plays for them.

I think it is fair to say that three-year-old kinder is probably one of the largest structural reforms that has been made in our education system in this state for a very, very long time. It is something that I am very, very pleased about, that investment that has been made by the Andrews Labor government. Unfortunately it is disappointing to see that the Morrison government has not at this stage chosen to partner with the Andrews government in delivering this three-year-old kinder reform. I wish they would reflect over the coming months on this in the lead-up to their October budget and that they would choose ultimately to recognise the wisdom of this government in its three-year-old kinder reform program and that they choose in a very active way to partner with us.

As I said earlier, South Barwon and Geelong are Australia’s fastest growing regional communities throughout Australia. We have a lot of first and second home buyers moving into our region. The investment that is required in our community to deliver kinder services will be profound. We are prepared as the Andrews government to make those investments. I know the council wishes to make those investments, and I certainly hope that the Morrison government will partner with us to deliver that infrastructure and to engage the teaching cohort required to deliver three-year-old kinder. I look forward to that in the years to come. As I say, I am hopeful that the Morrison government will partner with us.

These reforms are profound, these reforms are big structural changes. They of course come with a substantial price tag. We are prepared, as the Andrews government, to make that investment to make a difference to those kids. We are prepared to partner with local government and private providers and we are prepared to get this reform done. I look forward to the Morrison government coming to the table, making their contribution and delivering this important reform that is so important to give three-year-olds across the state of Victoria the very, very best educational start that we can. Kindergarten, just from my observation as a parent, is so important; it is so profound for setting kids up going to school.

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (22:30): Ready for kinder, ready for school, ready for life: three-year-old kinder is gold. It was no surprise that our signature policy platform and massive reform to our kinder system that we took to the 2018 election resonated with the people of Bass. When you do not look at it in isolation but alongside other programs, policies and commitments—dental vans in schools, mental health professionals in high schools, free TAFE, Local Jobs First—a thread sort of weaving in and out of equitable services and programs, of attainable opportunities, starts to emerge. You can see it; you can even draw it. It is driven by the want of equality of opportunity. It is very Labor, and it makes so much sense: a path and a pathway where we socially invest in our communities, starting from the beginning, so we are better off as a collective and as a society.

We all want the best for our kids, and if we want them to have that best start possible, then it is our duty as a community and as a society to make sure it is also afforded to everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from. We have heard, to a point that it is etched in our brains too, that around 90 per cent of brain development occurs before the age of five: cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development. By five years of age children even know that sounds make up words. They
use the past and the present tenses; they have a concept of time; they can link words, use pronouns and make sentences to tell stories. In fact they pretty much have the structure of a whole language down pat. But if you have underlying language and social skills concerns, then this directly impacts on literacy and academic achievement later on. We just have to give every child the opportunity to succeed and make sure they are ready for school and set for life.

Our early childhood community, educators and everyone involved are just amazing: inspiring, dedicated, creative and super passionate. Many of us in our community have a whole new appreciation of them, as during the pandemic they have worked over and above to provide a service for frontline workers as well.

Since being elected I have visited all of my schools, most of my kinders—I have about 55 in Bass—to chat and meet about their priorities both in the social and capital investment spaces. I want to make sure that they are best placed to be able to give their children the best start. I have attended openings, story times, national simultaneous story times, dress-ups—I am a bit partial to dress-ups—and singing sessions. I even had a singalong with a ukulele in hand, which I will say was my first live new instrument gig with kids. They were really kind and very understanding with my three chords and my Justine Clarke song, which they kept asking me to play over and over again.

The member for Eltham—I was really animated at her description of all the goings-on in a kinder: the learnings, the connections, the imaginations, the creativity, the play and the support for the kids and also for their parents and carers. I do not know about people’s houses during the last couple of months, but mine certainly looked like a kinder space at home and in the garden as we were working on many projects—very creative in that time.

I just want to start with the start of kinder. Bass has not started the rollout, but our neighbouring shire, South Gippsland, has, and that is the closest one. Many people in Bass do go into South Gippsland shire for their kinder services. Michelle Gough, preschool field officer for the South Gippsland and Bass Coast shire councils, has been working in childhood education for about 35 years. She stated:

… the rollout of three-year-old …

kinder

is the most exhilarating time …

in her career. She said:

Finally, a Victorian government is not only acknowledging the critical importance of early education, but also backing that up with significant long-term financial investment.

What we have in South Gippsland, on a par with many areas in Bass as well, is that nearly a quarter of the kids that are currently starting school are starting school with developmental vulnerabilities in at least one area, if not two.

But I want to sort of move around a bit as well and talk about TAFE because why work in early childhood education? It is the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children and their families. When we think about this whole rollout program we kind of need a whole workforce as well. In January this year I was thrilled to return to the centre where my kids went and was delighted to see familiar faces and open arms, have the educators asking after the kids and see the renos which brought even more warmth, colour and natural materials into the grounds of the centre. They also eagerly await my return with a ukulele in hand to belt out maybe three songs this time. But they also thought it was really sweet when I mentioned that my little one, Luciano, soon to be 10, still says that we need to bring the little blue bowl back that is in our cupboard and that we have our cereal out of to the childcare centre. It has been in our cupboard for about six years, and I am not sure how it actually came home.

Back to the story: I did represent the minister responsible for the portfolios of trades, skills and higher education. At the centre we had from the Chisholm Institute their executive and trainers and also representatives, obviously, from the childcare centre, because when you bring in the biggest reform to early childhood education in Victoria’s history you not only need the infrastructure but you kind of
need to train up a whole workforce. The free TAFE courses make sure everyone has the opportunity to study locally and ideally work locally as well.

I will just quickly talk about the build because, as I mentioned, when you have a massive rollout you have got to train up a workforce and build a whole heap of buildings. As mentioned earlier, our Andrews Labor government is committed to investing $1.6 billion to support the building and expansion of almost 1000 kinders across the state. It is a big job even working out where to start, but last year I welcomed the Deputy Premier and the parliamentary secretary, the member— (Time expired)

The SPEAKER: I would like to thank all members who have contributed to the debate on that motion.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

SENTENCING AMENDMENT (EMERGENCY WORKER HARM) BILL 2020

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (22:38): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Worker Harm) Bill 2020 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, line 7, after “others” insert “and to require a review of the amendments made by this Act to be undertaken”.

NEW CLAUSE

2. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 5—

“5A New section 116A inserted

After section 116 of the Sentencing Act 1991 insert—

“116A Review of amendments made by Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Worker Harm) Act 2020

(1) The Minister must cause a review to be undertaken of the operation and effectiveness of the amendments made by the Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Worker Harm) Act 2020 as soon as practicable after the period of 12 months after the day on which that Act came into operation.

(2) The Minister must cause a report on the outcome of the review to be laid before each House of Parliament as soon as practicable after the review is completed.”.”.

Ms HENNESSY (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety: COVID-19) (22:38): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I would like to thank the wit and wisdom from the other side of the chamber as you tap your watch. Can I also just acknowledge Mr Grimley from the other place and the Justice Party. They are amendments that we think are sensible. They ultimately provide some form of clarification on the bill and require a report back to the Parliament within 12 months if it is reasonably practicable to do so. They are certainly, we think, sensible, and we are happy to be cooperative about them.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house’s decision.
POSTPONEMENT

Ms HENNESSY (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety: COVID-19) (22:39): I move:

That remaining business be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

GANNAWARRA SHIRE COUNCIL

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (22:40): (2691) My adjournment issue tonight is for the Premier and it concerns the need to appoint a commission of inquiry into the Gannawarra council. I wrote to the Minister for Local Government on 4 October last year about issues of poor governance and bullying at the Gannawarra council and raised the need for a commission of inquiry with the minister in the adjournment debate of 29 October last year. The minister responded to both these requests by writing to the mayor of the Gannawarra council, Lorraine Learmonth, encouraging the council and the CEO to work together to address the issues of bullying and poor governance at that council. Unfortunately since that letter to the mayor from the minister, two councillors have resigned because they believed the behaviour towards them had not improved. In fact one of those councillors was issued a doctor’s certificate for depression because of the way he was treated by the CEO.

There is a view that as punishment for the two councillors who raised concerns about the bullying and poor governance and resigned, the CEO is now doing all in his power to thwart the use of a federal government grant to upgrade the Cohuna airport. He has been granted unfettered powers by the existing councillors that are still there to make planning decisions that could mean that that project will not go ahead, and that will put at risk the air ambulance flights into Cohuna and the service that it provides to the Cohuna hospital. The hospital is highly valued by the community. It is one of the few hospitals in the region that still is providing obstetrics services and needs the air ambulance service. Two other projects in Cohuna—the need for a new swimming pool and a waterfront development—are also suffering because of these actions.

A whistleblower has now raised concerns about the review process of the CEO’s performance and salary, with allegations of the consultant engaged to do that performance review breaking confidentiality by reporting concerns from some councillors raised about the CEO’s conduct to the CEO—highly inappropriate—and the fact that the CEO has now had a 20 per cent salary increase while other council staff are held to 2 per cent. Good governance, treating people with respect and working with all the communities of the shire should be at the core of the local government—unfortunately something that has not happened over an extended period of time at the Gannawarra council. In the best interests of the ratepayers of the Gannawarra council area, I ask the Premier to instigate a commission of inquiry into the bullying and poor governance of the Gannawarra council.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (22:42): (2692) My adjournment request is for the Minister for Mental Health. The action I seek is an update on how the mental health system is addressing concerns in the electorate of Broadmeadows. The Victorian government has announced a funding increase to support Victoria’s mental health system and ensure Victorians get the care they need as demand for services spikes during the coronavirus crisis. In April the Premier and the Minister for Mental Health announced almost $60 million extra in a package to help meet demand as Victorians seek help for stress, isolation and the uncertainty that has led to anxiety.
While staying at home and practising social isolation is vital to slowing the spread of the virus, it can be difficult for people’s mental health and wellbeing. Almost $7 million will help mental health services deliver support for people with severe mental illness via phone and video to prevent relapse and emergency department presentations. Another almost $7 million will expand online and phone counselling services through Beyond Blue, Lifeline, Kids Helpline and SuicideLine Victoria. This funding will boost the capacity of the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council and Tandem helplines, which are also experiencing a large increase in calls.

**WEDDING INDUSTRY**

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (22:44): (2693) First and foremost, so I never forget, do not swap an adjournment with the member for Forest Hill, again, because it just added an extra 5 hours to my day. I should have been on yesterday. My adjournment today is to the Premier, and I ask for the Premier to meet with the wedding industry to provide a road map for getting weddings back on track. The reason I ask this is many businesses within the community of Gembrook have been impacted during the COVID virus, and that impact is continuing, particularly for hairdressers, florists, make-up artists and those within the industry and the hospitality industry who normally would conduct weddings—including places like Puffing Billy, who have that struggle to get business and get people back into town. Those organisations would love to see a road map.

Now, they are not saying to lift all the restrictions straightaway, but they do need to plan because, as we know—many in this place have been to a wedding or had one of their own; some have had more than one—each time you have a wedding you must make sure you take the time to plan and get ready. You do not just plan it in a week; it takes a long period of time. I know when I got engaged, engagement to marriage took three years, and I want to make sure that people who have the opportunity to plan that can have that. I ask the Premier to meet with the industry as soon as he can.

**RACISM**

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (22:45): (2694) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Box Hill, either in person or virtually, to listen to the concerns of our local Chinese Australian community regarding the increase in racist incidents that have been reported in recent months.

Victoria’s Chinese community is one of the largest and most established cultural groups in Victoria and has profoundly influenced the social, economic and cultural landscape of our state. Victoria’s Chinese community is also one of the oldest migrant communities, with Melbourne’s Chinatown being the second-longest continuous Chinese settlement in the Western world. The Chinese community in Victoria and in Box Hill is also very diverse. Members of the community come from many different countries of origin, speak different languages and have different opinions on a range of issues. Even those from the same country who speak a common language share many different views, but like others in our community, they have dug deep when times are tough and helped out those in need.

During January I had the pleasure of attending a local Chinese restaurant for a bushfire fundraiser with the local Chinese community. The event raised more than $20,000 in a single evening. Fundraising efforts continued in the following weeks, with members rattling tins in the Box Hill mall to support the Red Cross bushfire appeal. Sadly, due to COVID-19 concerns, the Lunar New Year celebrations were cancelled, thwarting efforts to collect further donations.

When the first travel restrictions were put in place the local Chinese community in Box Hill was amongst the first to be affected, with a reduction in friends and family visiting from China and those who were themselves returning from China diligently keeping in self-isolation. It was their care, their commitment and their patience that bought Victoria time to prepare its health response. As the Prime Minister himself has acknowledged, it is the Chinese Australians themselves who have done more than any other group to protect us against this pandemic. As the pandemic developed, members of the local Chinese community also donated money and sourced personal protective equipment and sanitisers from
their overseas networks, which they donated to the Eastern Health foundation. Another community group had 700 volunteers helping those who were self-isolating at home when returning to Australia.

Notwithstanding this response, in February the Australian Human Rights Commission recorded more complaints under the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 than at any time over the past 12 months. One-third of all racism complaints made to the commission since the start of February have been related to COVID-19. Racism is not just against the law, it is against the shared values that unite Victorians. The racial vilification of Asian Australians or of any other group has no place in a multicultural Victoria. I know that I join with the vast majority of Victorians in condemning these racist attacks. I look forward to the minister’s response.

SANDRINGHAM HOSPITAL

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (22:48): (2695) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health in the other place, and the action that I seek is that the minister respond to question on notice 2303, which I lodged for response some 92 days ago. In press releases dated 15 March and 1 April the Minister for Health spoke at length about the Andrews government’s intention to boost the available number of hospital beds across Victoria in order to adequately prepare for the potential onset of coronavirus. To this end, my question explicitly sought assurances from the minister that funding would be provided to ensure that the number of beds and effective full-time staff at my local community hospital, being the Sandringham Hospital, would increase to at least what it was before the closure of ward G3 late last year.

Noting that more than 30 per cent of the Sandringham district’s residents are deemed to be at high risk of contracting and severely suffering from coronavirus, I pre-emptively asked this question of the minister as a matter of the highest priority for public health within the Sandringham district. As yet, disappointingly, not only does the Sandringham Hospital not have extra beds, the members of my community do not have even so much as a response from the minister as to why our community hospital was left without additional capacity in the face of potentially extreme danger to public health.

What makes this even more galling in my view is the minister’s continued failure to provide Alfred Health with the funding that is required to permanently—not temporarily but permanently—replace the eight beds and seven effective full-time nursing positions that were lost at the Sandringham Hospital when ward G3 closed last year. This is in spite of a community petition with more than 8000 signatures and the multiple letters, questions on notice and parliamentary contributions that I have made on behalf of the many residents who rely on the outstanding services provided at our local hospital.

Whilst the minister’s lack of action has spoken louder frankly than any words ever could, that does not mean that my community does not deserve an answer, and that is what I am seeking from the minister tonight.

ROSANNA ROAD TRUCK CURFEWS

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) (22:50): (2696) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads. I do say to the Minister for Roads that the action that I seek is the reinstatement of the truck curfews on Rosanna Road. Let us be very, very clear that it is all very well to lift those truck curfews on Rosanna Road to chase down a few toilet rolls and to make sure that our supermarkets get the attention that they need in the delivery of services, but we are saying throughout the community that we are lifting our concerns and our restrictions in relation to COVID-19 and the pandemic that has caused chaos and destruction and great distress across the world. Can I say that as the Parliamentary Secretary for Health I commend the Minister for Health and the great work that we have done here in Victoria and acknowledge the great distress that we have seen across the world. But all the same, as we lift those restrictions across our state, what is also important are the election commitments that we made and that were reaffirmed by the electorate at the ballot box, which were the introduction of curfews and the banning of trucks on Rosanna Road and associated roads in my electorate, as we were elected in 2014.

We saw the lifting of bans on a range of heavy vehicles that were not allowed to use Rosanna Road and surrounding roads in the northern suburbs and that had to use those significant freeways and arterial roads already existing in our streets. We understand as a community why we needed to do our bit and lift those
restrictions and set them aside whilst deliveries needed to be made. But to VicRoads and to the community it is very important to reinstate those restrictions that were put in place and that were affirmed not only at the 2014 election but at the 2018 election as well.

What I think is important is, to make sure we keep the local schools and the local communities in those areas safe, to push those trucks back out and hold them accountable. Those services need to be removed from our local streets. Whilst it is important that the goods have been returned to local streets as we have lifted our pandemic restrictions in local communities, it is also important to make sure that those truck curfews are reinstated in our community since they were affirmed at the past two elections by the local residents. As a Rosanna resident in my community I know Rosanna Road. I can hear them in the middle of the night, those trucks. They need to get out of Rosanna Road. VicRoads needs to be held accountable to deliver the restrictions that were previously in place and were affirmed at the 2014 and 2018 elections by the community. We will hold you to account. We expect those restrictions to be put back in place, particularly to reward the great work we have all done together to reduce the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HOFFMAN BRICKWORKS SITE, BRUNSWICK

Dr READ (Brunswick) (22:53): (2697) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to guarantee the preservation of the heritage buildings at the former Hoffman Brickworks site in Dawson Street, Brunswick. Last Friday the roof of the former steam engine house collapsed. Melbourne has lost far too many historic buildings, and this is one of real significance. It opened in 1870 and many Brunswick residents worked there. By 1890 it was the largest brick and pottery works in Victoria. Many of the nearby parklands were once clay quarries that fed the brickworks, and thousands of Melbourne’s buildings were built with bricks from this factory that sits just around the corner from former Prime Minister John Curtin’s house.

After the brickworks were closed in 1993 they were sold to a developer who committed to a conservation management plan that included opening up spaces of the brickworks for the public. In 2017 the owners applied for a demolition permit, which was successfully opposed. Then in 2018 there was a fire in the brick pressing shed which damaged some of the structure and roof. A temporary roof was discussed between the owner, the council and Heritage Victoria, but so far nothing has been installed. Neither Moreland council nor Heritage Victoria has sufficient authority to enforce preservation of these important buildings. The state government must intervene to ensure that we do not lose this important heritage site. The community is asking that the government require that the owner secure and stabilise the walls of building 6; repair the roof of building 5, which has been left open to the weather for several years; undertake all of the conservation and interpretation actions reflected in existing Heritage Victoria and council permits, including restoring the brick pressing machinery; and have a qualified archaeologist undertake an audit of remaining equipment and materials.

The government should also establish independent oversight of these actions through Heritage Victoria, Moreland council and the Save the Brickworks group, and the government can ensure that subsequent development permits do not further diminish the significance of the site nor reduce the existing commitment to publicly accessible interpretation. We do not want to see this important part of our heritage demolished by neglect, particularly now when our state government has a clear opportunity to intervene.

YAN YEAN ELECTORATE YOUTH ROUND TABLE

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (22:55): (2698) I am pleased to contribute to the adjournment debate tonight, and I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Youth. The action I seek is for her to attend the youth round table in the electorate of Yan Yean to hear firsthand from those young people who have been advising me over a long period of time about the needs and aspirations of young people in the electorate of Yan Yean and more particularly the difficult period that every human being on this planet and every person in Victoria has been dealing with during the COVID-19 epidemic.
I really want to thank the young people from my Yan Yean round table—Sienna Clarke, Ebony Layley, Aden Davison, Bethany Cordell, Holli Smith, Radhvi Gor, James Curtis, Zoe Papaleo, Tanner O’Mara and Brendan Rae—for the work that they have done over a significant period of time in being a voice for young people in the Yan Yean electorate, particularly in the difficult period that we have had during the COVID-19 pandemic. I would value the Minister for Youth coming to meet with the Yan Yean round table to hear from them firsthand about what they need but also advise them on what support from the Andrews Labor government is available to young people in the Yan Yean electorate.

FISHERY LICENCES

Mr Morris (Mornington) (22:57): (2699) I want to raise a matter for the Minister for Fishing and Boating, and the action I am seeking is that the minister provide significant financial relief for holders of rock lobster fishery licences. Those licensees have been significantly disadvantaged by the coronavirus pandemic, and they are now facing ridiculous hikes in their licence fees.

By way of background, a lobster fishery access licence, which is what is required to commercially fish, is considered to be a cost-recoverable service. That means the levies are set in line with Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) guidelines. The annual levy is imposed at licence renewal time. Now, the licence itself is not a catch control tool. That is based on a catch quota, but the quota is not issued until a licence has been obtained or is renewed. It is a two-zone fishery with an eastern zone and a western zone. The eastern zone has only 1000 quota units, while the western zone has 3633.48 quota units—I love the ‘.48’ there. There are also conditions relating to the number of pots per boat, but they do not bear directly on the matter I am raising this evening. Quota units are transferable. They form the basis of dividing up the total allowable commercial catch. Quotas are believed to be the most effective way of managing this important resource sustainably. That may be true; I cannot confirm that but I do not contest it either at this point.

What we do know is true is that the cost of a licence is to rise significantly; I am aware that the cost of one licence in the eastern zone is going to rise by one-third this year. I am also advised that the total allowable commercial catch in the eastern zone has declined by a third over the last four years, so the cost is going through the roof without explanation. By way of a sidebar, I would urge the minister to consider improving transparency beyond simply providing an explanation that costs and therefore the fees have risen in line with DTF guidelines. I think that would be a significant improvement.

Costs have gone through the roof while the available catch per licence has reduced significantly. The principal markets have not been available for some months and exports appear to be off the table—no pun intended. Even without the impact of the pandemic, rapidly rising costs and a rapidly reducing availability of cash surely justify financial relief. Under the current circumstances that really is essential. I urge the minister to act immediately to provide significant financial relief for this important industry.

CRANBOURNE ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Ms Richards (Cranbourne) (23:00): (2700) My adjournment is to the Deputy Premier, and the action I seek is an update on how secondary schools in Cranbourne will benefit from the Andrews Labor government’s record investment in education. I am particularly interested in seeking an update on three projects: firstly the upgrade to St Peter’s College, the new gym and performing arts centre at Cranbourne Secondary College and the new school at Cranbourne West.

St Peter’s is a terrific coeducational Catholic regional college. The school is ably led by the principal, Chris Black, and two campus heads, Julie Banda and Jeremy Wright. I am particularly pleased to welcome Jeremy to the Cranbourne community—a top-notch educator who taught my own daughters many years ago. Cranbourne Secondary is an important school that provides great support for the mental health of its students. They are going to get a new gym and performing arts centre, which I am sure will enhance an already wonderful school. And I would like to welcome the new principal of Cranbourne West, Rob Duncan. I am excited to see how this new school builds in structure and student
numbers, and I am particularly delighted it will include a special development school. Could the minister please update the community on the work that is being done in this area?

RESPONSES

The SPEAKER: I ask the Minister for Child Protection to refer the matters that have been presented tonight.

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North—Minister for Child Protection, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (23:01): May I be truly blessed that none of them are mine! There we go.

The member for Murray Plains had a question for the Premier in relation to the Gannawarra council, and I will forward that on to him. The member for Broadmeadows had a question for the Minister for Mental Health in relation to services in the Broadmeadows area. The member for Gembrook had a question for the Premier in relation to the wedding industry. The member for Box Hill had a question for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs on racism in relation to the Chinese community in Box Hill. The member for Sandringham had a question for the Minister for Health in relation to his local community hospital in Sandringham. The member for Ivanhoe had a question for the Minister for Roads in relation to truck bans. The member for Brunswick had a question for the Minister for Planning in relation to the historic brickworks in Dawson Street, Brunswick. The member for Yan Yean had a request for the Minister for Youth to visit the youth round table she set up. The member for Mornington had a question for the Minister for Fishing and Boating in relation to licence fees in relation to a particular individual in Flinders, I think we believe. Yes?

Mr Morris: Rock lobsters.

Mr DONNELLAN: Rock lobsters? Yes; beautiful. I will not break out into the B-52’s; we will leave that alone. And the member for Cranbourne had a question for the Minister for Education.

The SPEAKER: The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 11.03 pm until Tuesday, 4 August.