PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION

WEDNESDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2020


By authority of the Victorian Government Printer
The Governor
The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

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

The ministry

Premier .................................................. The Hon. DM Andrews, MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Mental Health The Hon. JA Merlino, MP
Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Resources The Hon. J Symes, MLC
Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop .................. The Hon. JM Allan, MP
Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Higher Education . The Hon. GA Tierney, MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Industrial Relations .................. The Hon. TH Pallas, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads and Road Safety . 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 Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for Equality .................. The Hon. MP Foley, MP
Attorney-General ........................................... The Hon. J Hennessy, MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and Minister for Fishing and Boating ........ The Hon. MM Horne, MP
Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support .................. The Hon. NM Hutchins, MP
Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development and Minister for Veterans .................. The Hon. SL Leane, MLC
Minister for Water and Minister for Police and Emergency Services . The Hon. LM Neville, MP
Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and Minister for Racing .................. The Hon. MP Pakula, MP
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Creative Industries ........ The Hon. DJ Pearson, MP
Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, and Minister for Small Business ........ The Hon. JL Pulford, MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth .................. The Hon. RL Spence, MP
Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood ........ The Hon. I Stitt, MLC
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs .................. The Hon. G Williams, MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing .................. The Hon. RW Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary ............................................ Ms M Thomas, MP
OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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Speaker
The Hon. CW BROOKS

Deputy Speaker
Ms JM EDWARDS

Acting Speakers
Ms Blandthorn, Mr J Bull, Mr Carbines, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, 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
Ms Connolly, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Mr Morris and Mr T Smith.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee
Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Mr Newbury, Ms Settle, 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, Mr Cheeseman, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Sheed, 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.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee
Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Ms Kilkenny.
Council: Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur and Ms Patten.
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Wednesday, 9 December 2020

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 10.02 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (10:02): 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 (10:03): I wish to advise the house that general business, notice of motion 38, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing that matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2.00 pm today.

Petitions

Following petitions presented to house by Clerk:

MYRNIONG BIOLINK

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria,

The Petition of Residents from Myrniong and surrounding areas draws to the attention of the House the impact on natural assets by the proposed High Voltage Overhead Transmission Lines of the Western Transmission Network project. A 75m wide easement will cut through a series of critical wildlife corridors known as the Myrniong Biolink. This community-led project invested $1.7 Million dollars of Victorian tax payer funds over 4 years restoring habitat on 29km of three creek lines.

Many Birds of Prey such as Wedge-tailed Eagles and the locally threatened Little Eagles will fall victim to collisions with overhead powerlines. It’s important that the areas natural assets be protected.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria direct that the high voltage transmission lines of Western Transmission Network are placed underground to ensure the power to Melbourne is not only renewable but truly GREEN and UNSEEN.

By Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (534 signatures).

MOUNT GELLIBRAND FIRE TOWER

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria. This Petition of the residents of South West Victoria call on the Victorian State Government to provide the necessary funding to ensure the immediate return to service and safe operation of the Mt Gellibrand Fire Tower. The Mt Gellibrand Fire Tower is an essential element in fire prevention and management in South West Victoria.

By Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (991 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition lodged by member for Buninyong be considered next day on motion of Ms STALEY (Ripon).

Ordered that petition lodged by member for Polwarth be considered next day on motion of Mr Riordan (Polwarth).
Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

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

- Auditor-General:
  - Sexual Harassment in Local Government—Ordered to be published
  - Systems and Support for Principal Performance—Ordered to be published

- Commission for Children and Young People—Keep caring: Systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care—Ordered to be published

- Community Visitors—Report 2019–20—Ordered to be published


- Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Account—Report 2019–20 on the disbursement of revenue

- Victorian Fisheries Authority—Report 2019–20


**Bills**

- **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2020–2021) BILL 2020**

- **STATE TAXATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL 2020**

- **PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMENDMENT (QUARANTINE FEES) BILL 2020**

  *Council’s agreement*

  The SPEAKER (10:05): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: Appropriation (Parliament 2020–2021) Bill 2020, the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2020 and the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Quarantine Fees) Bill 2020.

**Members statements**

**KELLY-ANN MAGUIRE**

Ms HENNESSY (Altona—Attorney-General) (10:06): I rise to pay tribute to a wonderful friend, local community member and person who has done lots of volunteering work in my electorate office, Kelly-ann Maguire. About three years ago Kelly-ann’s mother came into our office looking for opportunities for Kelly-ann to make a contribution, and since that time Kelly-ann has been doing lots of help and has become a really valued part of the team as well. I am very proud that all of the team members in my office welcomed Kelly-ann with open arms and with open minds as well. Kelly-ann is a person with Down syndrome and is a person that has extraordinary capacity and capability to support other people in our community. She has, like many people with a disability, taught so many people in our office about different ways of doing things. She has been incredibly resilient when various controversial issues have been at the fore. We know that electorate officers have to deal with those matters, and she has done that with great resilience and aplomb. Her and her mother are now driving around Australia on a holiday. She will be leaving us. She leaves with our love, support and gratitude. Thank you, Kelly-ann.

**DAME MARGARET GUILFOYLE**

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (10:07): Margaret Georgina Constance Guilfoyle, 15 May 1926 to 11 November 2020. Dame Margaret was a senior and influential minister for the entirety of the Fraser government. She was a senator, first elected for Victoria in 1971. She would make history many times, for the first time when she became a minister in 1975, the Minister for Education. She went on to be
Minister for Finance and was the first woman to hold that portfolio. In a lifetime of many, many firsts, Dame Margaret never stopped supporting other women. In fact when she became finance minister—and of course was lauded to be the first woman to hold a senior cabinet ministry position with a portfolio—she said what was important was not that she was the first but that she not be the last. Liberal Party historian and former member of the other place Margaret Fitzherbert summed her up well:

She was smart, charming, feminine and worked exceptionally hard. She was a living link to the strong, tough women who helped found the Liberal Party. The party has lost a giant. Vale, Dame Margaret.

STANLEY PARK NORTH PLAYGROUND, HARCOURT

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) (10:09): I was thrilled to officially open the new play space at Stanley Park north in Harcourt, made possible by a $350 000 investment from the Andrews Labor government. From a new climbing wall to a high tower and a 10-metre-long slide, kids and kids at heart in Harcourt now have their own awesome new play space in the centre of town thanks to the Victorian government. The park is a community hub for the residents of Harcourt, and the design of the new play equipment reflects the district’s fruit-growing history and is inspired by traditional apple crates. There is also a wheelchair-accessible carousel, rocker and spinner, traditional swings, a meeting place for storytelling and a new path to the Harcourt dirt park, swimming pool and pony club.

I acknowledge the Mount Alexander Shire Council, the Maldon Bendigo Community Bank and the Harcourt Progress Association for their contributions and commitment to the project. On Monday I visited the Castlemaine Goods Shed with Castlemaine State Festival director Glyn Roberts and deputy chair Christine Nixon to discuss the successful budget announcement for stage 2 of the Goods Shed redevelopment: $6 million in funding has been allocated towards upgrades for the Castlemaine Goods Shed. This funding will create two new spaces, including an open area for exhibitions and a flexible theatre space. This is one element of a $34.7 million package for regional creative infrastructure projects backing regional galleries, boosting regional economies and providing more creative experiences for Victorians wherever they live. Also home to the Castlemaine Circus, this second stage will mean this beautiful piece of historic railway infrastructure is being reimagined and turned into a fantastic community arts hub that the whole community can enjoy.

GREATER SHEPPARTON SECONDARY COLLEGE

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (10:10): Shepparton residents were surprised yesterday to see the Department of Education and Training suddenly shift Genevieve Simpson from the role of executive principal of Labor’s Shepparton super-school. Ms Simpson was appointed directly by the Minister for Education. What people might not know is that the government’s hand was forced by teachers who are fed up with the school’s toxic culture. Last week more than 50 teachers were going to strike over concerns about bullying by Ms Simpson. When upset teachers sought the union’s assistance, however, amazingly they were told the AEU would not sanction a strike and as a result they risked being sacked. There has been an exodus of teachers under Ms Simpson’s leadership, but the straw that broke the camel’s back for many of them was her decision to send Xavier Tanner, a much-respected assistant principal at the former Wanganui Park Secondary College with decades of experience, on gardening leave. Teachers believe this decision was made because Mr Tanner questioned Ms Simpson’s decision not to replace him when he retires at the end of next year.

Many teachers are disenchanted and destroyed by the lack of consultation. They are working hard to support each other, but there is a lack of goodwill towards the executive. Papering over these cracks will not do any good. The challenge for the government now is to engage genuinely and meaningfully with teachers and parents.

EUROA ELECTORATE WEED CONTROL

Ms RYAN: Landholders along the north-east corridor are fed up with the Andrews government’s neglect of weed control. The government is failing to comply with the Catchment and Land Protection
Act 1994, which requires all landowners to manage declared noxious weeds and pest animals on their land. Landholders are sick to death of trying to control weeds while the government abrogates its responsibilities.

MONASH CITY COUNCIL

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (10:12): Following on from my members statement previously and my congratulations to the newly appointed Monash councillors, it was also fantastic to see women’s representation in the Monash council double from two to four, and I look forward to working with returned councillor Rebecca Paterson and the new councillors, Tina Samardzija, Nicky Luo and Anjalee de Silva. I am sure they will serve Monash well.

GLENALLEN SCHOOL

Mr FREGON: Following on from my budget statement yesterday, where I talked a little bit about Glenallen School, I also wanted to just really thank the principal, Michael Cole, and the art teacher, Deb Buzza, for their assistance with all of the students who have contributed to my Christmas cards this year. For those in the house that received my Christmas cards, the artwork had been done by the awesome students at Glenallen. I would also like to quickly acknowledge the recipients of the Norm Gibbs Community Award. For those who do not know Norm, he is a fantastic Waverley gent. Merry Christmas and happy festivus to Norm and Topsy. The award winners at Glenallen were Matthew Lim and Grace Lambrick, who have been exceptional students and will obviously go on to fantastic futures.

FELICITATIONS

Mr FREGON: In my last little bit for the year can I please just acknowledge my thanks to my fantastic electorate office staff: John, Rachel, Alex and Lisa. Also thank you to Adriana and Josh for their work this year. It has been a really hard year, and you have all done us very proud.

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (10:14): Local landholders, tourism operators and visitors to the Grampians National Park were recently shocked to learn that Parks Victoria is planning to reintroduce dingoes to the park as proposed in the Gariwerd management plan. The Grampians are surrounded by prime grazing land, and the devastation caused to stock by wild dogs is well known to the Andrews Labor government. In this year’s budget alone there is $4.4 million allocated to a special wild dog project, and I note funding is provided to reduce the risk wild dogs pose to primary production, biodiversity and community health in Victoria. A further $14 million has been allocated to additional pest and wild dog management. It seems absurd then that Labor would spend millions to manage harm caused by wild dogs but then have plans to reintroduce wild dogs to an area where so much damage would be caused to stock in addition to the threat to young families and children that visit the park, existing small and native animals and the biodiversity of the Grampians. I ask the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change to categorically rule out her preposterous plan to reintroduce dingoes to the Grampians National Park.

ELIZA CREEK

Ms KEALY: Congratulations to Eliza Creek of Nhill, who recently won the Melbourne Recital Centre’s 2020 Newsboys Foundation Regional Music Award. Eliza has undertaken five years of flute lessons online as local lessons just were not available in the Nhill area. It is a true credit to her commitment, her love of the flute and the sweet sound of the flute, and her amazing talent, so congratulations, Eliza. We are so proud of you.

SECURE WORK PILOT SCHEME

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (10:15): This pandemic has laid bare a lot of injustices and fault lines. One of those is people and families living with insecure work. We need to rebuild not just a better economy but also a better society. This is our chance to make sure that those who are vulnerable
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are protected. One of the reasons that sickness spreads is that people are forced to go to work not because they want to but because they have to. But they should not have too. If we are sick, we must stay at home and get well. These casual insecure workers often live week to week. They are people who would struggle to pay the rent or put food on the table if they miss a shift. Hundreds of thousands of workers in Victoria do not get annual leave, sick leave or carers leave. Some get a little extra for being a casual, but that is really often a loading on the minimum wage, and it is usually never enough. Turning up to work sick is not good for them and it is not good for their family, but it is also not good for all of us in society, it is not good for the economy and it is not good for businesses.

From next year we are starting a trial for our most vulnerable insecure workers. It will mean these workers will have access to up to five days sick leave or carers leave. It is a safety net. It will mean that they have security, it will mean a healthier community and it will make our economy stronger and much more productive. It is about fairness, but it is also the right thing to do and the smart thing to do for the economy and for society.

ETHIOPIA CONFLICT

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:16): Today I want to speak about the ongoing violence occurring in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and its impact on the Australian-African community, especially in my electorate of Melbourne. On 4 November this year a violent conflict broke out in the north of Ethiopia between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front. Since that date all telephone and internet communication lines to Tigray have been cut off, banks have been shut down, roads have been blocked and there have been reports of hospitals being shelled and shortages of basic supplies and aid. It is believed that thousands of people have been killed. More than 45,000 have sought refuge in Sudan and neighbouring countries—50 per cent are children, over 700 so far have been pregnant women.

I recently met with members of the Tigrayan community in Melbourne. I was incredibly saddened to hear that many people here in Melbourne have family stuck in Tigray and they have not been able to contact them for nearly six weeks and have grave fears for their wellbeing. They know of at least 50 Australian citizens who are stuck in Ethiopia, and many of these are Victorians. So far I understand the federal government has not called for a ceasefire. The Tigrayan community members tell me the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade do not have a complete list of Australian citizens who are stranded in the conflict. The community in Victoria are calling for the federal government to do everything it can to support a peaceful resolution, get aid in and help come up with a plan to get stranded Australians out. I want to tell the community that I hear you, and I would like to urge the Victorian government to do all they can to support the community. I will send a letter today with some of the things that the Victorian government might be able to do to help them out.

CAMERON SMITH

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (10:18): At around 7.00 pm on Wednesday, 25 November, Cameron Smith was tragically killed near Station Street, Seaford, in an utterly senseless, horrific, vicious and brutal attack. He was just out getting pizza with his partner. Loving parents have lost a son, Taylah and Chantelle have lost their brother, Natasha has lost her partner, so many others have lost a friend and a workmate and four very young people have been charged over the incident—one of them, just 19 years of age, has been charged with murder. So many lives forever changed. A memorial to Cam sits under the big tree in Seaford’s main street adorned with flowers and photos, notes and other memories. People constantly come and go and pay their respects to the young man they knew. Others who did not know Cam stop while passing by to reflect on a young life cut short and try to grapple with the sheer senselessness and utter stupidity of violence.

I want to thank police and paramedics and others who tried so hard to save Cam that night. I want to acknowledge Victoria Police for their work in arresting the alleged offenders so quickly. I want to acknowledge the incredible Seaford community for their strength and resilience, for their outpouring of love and compassion and support towards Cam’s family and friends, sentiments echoed by Cam’s
father, Michael. Thanks to everyone who has donated to Cam’s GoFundMe page, and special thanks to Simon and Gemma Boucher for hosting the community barbecue at Seaford Life Saving Club last weekend. The tragedy has rocked the community, but it will not define the community. Seaford is a very caring, loving, vibrant and welcoming neighbourhood, and with the help and determination of so many locals who have contacted me personally we will work hard to make sure the local Seaford village remains vibrant and welcoming.

**ROTARY CLUB OF KINGLAKE RANGES**

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (10:19): The Rotary Club of Kinglake Ranges is spreading Christmas cheer by decorating the Kinglake township with handmade decorations, including stockings, Christmas trees and window displays. This is just in time for the Rotary club’s Christmas twilight market on 20 December. The first market back last month after the lifting of restrictions saw 3500 people attend, which was a welcome boost for local businesses and tourism. After the challenging year we have all had it is important that we celebrate these special times, and I commend the Rotary club for their efforts in making Christmas a great one across the Kinglake Ranges.

**TOOLANGI PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Ms McLEISH: Things do get stolen from primary schools, and recently Toolangi Primary School’s wheelbarrow was stolen from the school grounds. The school then had to embark on a fundraising venture by selling seedlings so they could purchase a new wheelbarrow. This comes just as the state budget revealed Toolangi would get absolutely zero. A number of other schools in the wider community did well, and they could certainly buy loads of wheelbarrows. Toolangi Primary School, along with many others, are in need of a leg-up in terms of maintenance and repairs. It is disappointing that the state government did not recognise this—or if they did, they simply did not take action.

**DAME MARGARET GUILFOYLE**

Ms McLEISH: I would like to acknowledge the loss of Liberal giant Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, who broke many barriers and forged the way for women in Liberal Party politics. She will be greatly missed.

**NAOMI GRULKE**

Ms McLEISH: I also want to acknowledge Naomi Grulke, who passed away on Remembrance Day. Naomi was a dedicated member of the Liberal Party who spent many days on polling booths. Her involvement with the party and equally the RSL was admirable. She will be greatly missed and fondly remembered.

**FELICITATIONS**

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (10:21): As we near the end of a year that has been unlike any other, I want to wish the families in my electorate of Tarneit a very happy holiday season. In particular I would like to wish the parents, teachers, early childhood educators and students a wonderful end to the school year. After the year that you have all had, you have earned it, and I think I am pretty safe to say we also need a holiday. For our VCE students, I wish them well on their results and their course offers next year. As a working parent who has also had the task of supervising the remote learning of two primary school aged children, I know how stressful and challenging the school year has been for us all. But you know what? We did it. We got through it. Our kids are back at school and excited for summer school holidays.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage everyone in my community to enjoy their summer in a safe and responsible way. Remember this pandemic is not over, and most certainly we have only to look to the UK, Europe and the US to know that they are facing a very dark winter and Christmas indeed. We have all worked hard to drive the virus out of our community street by street, house by house. This has not been without sacrifice and hardship this year. Let us remain vigilant and let us have
fun over this summer. Merry Christmas, Tarneit. I hope you find joy and peace with your family and friends over these summer school holidays. I look forward to once again being with you all in 2021.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RATES

Ms CUPPER (Mildura) (10:22): The experience of COVID-19 highlighted the unique vulnerabilities of our isolated region. It made me understand the gravity of my responsibility in the next two years to maximise my electorate’s role in statewide policy development. It brought home to me the importance and the urgency of having a more central place at the table.

My community needs this Parliament to get serious about regional rate reform. I know there is a review underway, but we have seen this many times before and nothing changes. It is a scandalous injustice that a ratepayer in Mildura with a modest house in a region that has been economically devastated by COVID-19 should have to pay twice the rates of the owner of a million-dollar mansion in Geelong. For many years, Merv Whelan, highly respected former local government CEO, commissioner and inspector, has urged successive governments to do something. He has produced highly sophisticated modelling and systems to show how it can be done. There is a way to fix this. The impact on city ratepayers would be negligible, but it would be truly game changing for rural and regional ratepayers, who are constantly required to shoulder the burden of inescapable upward cost pressures such as geographical isolation and population sparsity. It was the issue that inspired me to join the Reason coalition, and I look forward to changing the game again in 2021.

NORMA MAY CHERRY

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:23): I wanted to pay tribute to a couple of true believers, Labor members, who have recently passed away. Firstly, to Norma May Cherry. Norma was a very proud ALP member for 38 years and sadly passed away on 5 October. After having nine children, Norma and her husband, Ted Cherry, both joined their local ALP branch in the federal seat of Bruce in 1982. With Ted working and Norma doing volunteer work with the Glenallen special school and busy raising children at home, there was very little time for them to help out at their branch during election time, although they did ensure that they always went to any fundraising events and meetings as often as they could. Even before joining the ALP, both Norma and Ted were staunch ALP voters and republicans. Norma was proud Labor through and through and fondly remembered having her photo taken with Julia Gillard. Norma, you will be sadly missed.

DON D’AGOSTINO

Mr TAYLOR: Don D’Agostino: Don was a member of the Boronia branch for many years. Don sadly passed away on 9 November at the age of 81. I wanted to acknowledge the long service to the Labor Party by Don over many years. Don was president and a member of the Boronia branch for a long time and helped with all local elections, state and federal. His wife, Lyn, worked in the Boronia office of Peter Milton for years. Don was one of Labor’s true believers. He was the loved husband of Lyn and father, grandfather, brother and friend to many. Rest well, Don, and thank you for your service to the Labor Party.

FELICITATIONS

Mr TAYLOR: In the last few seconds, I just wanted to say again a massive thankyou to my entire community of Bayswater. I hope you all have a very merry Christmas and a happy and safe new year. Thank you to everyone in this place, and of course thank you to the staff at Parliament and at the Department of Parliamentary Services for doing a great job in 2020.

TIMBER INDUSTRY

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) (10:25): In August 2019 the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change commissioned another review of the code of forest practice for timber production. The review identified a number of issues with the code around clarity, accuracy, enforceability and
alignment with current government policies, strategies and access statements that manage forest biodiversity values. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) was supposed to align the code with current government policy commitments and strategies; ensure the code was free of errors, inconsistencies and ambiguities; and clarify boundaries with the roles of the regulator and regulated parties. In addition the revised code would provide ecological integrity, certainty for industry and community benefits.

DELWP have completed the review, identified the problems and provided solutions, but the minister refuses to implement them. This has left VicForests completely exposed to litigation and given the NGOs a menu of issues identified during the review that can be exploited as the basis for their court action. Part of the review identified that the code did not give industry certainty and did not align with current government policy and commitments. While the coalition do not support the Labor policy to stop harvesting native forest by 2030, keeping the industry going until 2030 was a commitment the Premier made that is being deliberately undermined by a completely incompetent minister. How can the Premier allow his minister to completely undermine his policy, leave his government agency exposed to vexatious litigants and put the livelihoods of hardworking timber families at risk? VicForests, their contractors and customers do not deserve to be treated like this. The Premier must step up and pull his rogue minister into line.

ST ALBANS ELECTORATE SCHOOLS FUNDING

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (10:26): Recently I had the pleasure of visiting multiple local schools to announce massive funding in my electorate: $10 million for Jackson special school in St Albans, $9.4 million for Furlong Park School for Deaf Children in Sunshine North and $6.9 million for Monmia Primary School in Keilor Downs. It was a very joyful event in sharing this exciting news with principal Joan O’Connor-Cox, principal Lee Bullock and principal Lorraine Bell. There were tears of joy from not only the principals but also the teachers, and most importantly the kids were absolutely excited and sent some special messages to the Premier and the Minister for Education. It was such a moment that I truly will not forget—seeing the smiles and tears of joy. We are certainly investing in education, and education is a priority for my electorate of St Albans.

FELICITATIONS

Ms SULEYMAN: Can I take this opportunity to wish everybody in my electorate from Sunshine Hospital health workers and our volunteers to everybody across the St Albans electorate a very merry Christmas and a safe, happy and prosperous new year. This January we will not be able to celebrate and welcome the Lunar New Year, but I will be able to participate in a digital festival that will broadcast to thousands within my community and in particular the Vietnamese community in 2021. I want to say to my Vietnamese community, to the traders and to everybody: chúc mừng năm mới!

NELSON PARK SCHOOL

Mr EREN (Lara) (10:28): I am extremely pleased to inform the house about the wonderful announcement that came out of the state budget last sitting. The Victorian government is providing $10 million to Nelson Park School to deliver the next stage of the school’s master plan. Nelson Park School is a wonderful school in my electorate. They are a prep to year 12 special school for students diagnosed with mild intellectual disability. The school offers a wide range of challenging, age-appropriate and exciting programs based on the Victorian curriculum. Teaching and educational support staff work alongside a variety of therapists, including speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and wellbeing officers, to ensure that the programs are individually tailored to meet the diverse needs of each student.

This funding will go a long way to ensuring that the staff and the students are learning and teaching in 21st-century learning facilities which will enable them to reach their full potential. Not only will this make sure our kids are getting a great education, it will create new local jobs as well. As I have mentioned to the house previously, I am proud of the Victorian government for supporting schools in
the Lara electorate to help their students achieve the best results and for planning for future upgrades for their school community. I am proud of this funding and I am pleased to have worked alongside this great school community to secure this funding. Special thanks to principal Libby Gatgens and all the staff and students and families who are doing amazing work for their school community. Congratulations to one and all.

MOLLIE HOLMAN AWARD

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (10:29): Again I rise to congratulate this year’s recipients of the Mollie Holman award for their efforts in promoting STEAM education within the school environment.

Congratulations to Jamie Ryan and David Goddard from Blackburn High School. Both Jamie and David have a strong passion for maths and science and participated in the school’s maths pathways program and Maths Olympiad team respectively.

Congratulations to Natalie Smith and Hayden Taylor from Box Hill High. Natalie and Hayden both overcame challenges presented by the COVID-19 restrictions to successfully design and build their STEAM-related inventions: a motion-activated mouse trap and a heavy-weather cockroach probe respectively.

Congratulations to Alexandra Boffa from Our Lady of Sion College. Alexandra was a member of the school’s Denise O’Hara Science Academy, and throughout her studies Alexandra has shown leadership in her studies through assisting others.

Congratulations to Cassie Wood and Hayden Stephens from St Thomas the Apostle Primary School in Blackburn. Both Cassie and Hayden have participated in the Maths Olympiad and tackled problem-solving tasks with a positive mindset and critical thinking.

Congratulations to William Thraves and Zoe Newbury from Box Hill North Primary School. Both William and Zoe demonstrated strong commitment to and passion for their learning in STEAM and have been able to accelerate their learning through the use of technology.

Congratulations to Spencer Jose and Zoe Farrow from Kerrimuir Primary School. Both Spencer and Zoe have demonstrated a strong dedication to STEAM learning, particularly through chess and robotics respectively.

FELICITATIONS

Mr HAMER: I would just finally like to wish everyone in the Box Hill community a very happy and safe Christmas and new year.

MACKIE CRICKET CLUB

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (10:31): Congratulations to this year’s captains and coaches as well as the executive committee of the Mackie Cricket Club. The Mackie Cricket Club was founded in 1954, and since 1962 has been located at Mackie Road Reserve in Bentleigh East. A great family-oriented club, its vision is to provide elite facilities and coaching for senior and junior players, female and male. They are continuing to grow in leaps and bounds. Last season they introduced a girls team and this season will introduce a women’s team. I am proud to support the mighty Mackie Machine again in the 2020–21 season.

COVID-19

Mr TAK: On another note, COVID-19 has posed all sorts of challenges, especially in our multicultural community. I am thankful for the great effort by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and her department in reaching out to the many multicultural communities in their languages. Thank you to all the community leaders for helping to disseminate COVID-safe messages in our many different languages. A special thanks to the SBS Khmer executive producer, Sopharany Hay, who has
worked tirelessly to get the message out into the Cambodian Victorian community. Her hard work and dedication has played a significant role in raising awareness and protecting our community.

FELICITATIONS

Mr TAK: I would like to give special thanks to my staff for their great effort. Lastly, I wish everyone in my community a safe and happy festive season.

BRIDGE DAREBIN

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:32): Last week I had the privilege of joining Chris Lombardo and her magnificent team at Bridge Darebin as they inducted their newest team members. Fifteen locals have been given an opportunity to work under the leadership of Chris on projects that will make a significant impact on the lives of those they touch and will also make a positive impact on those fortunate to be asked to join the Bridge family. These 15 positions have been made possible by the Working for Victoria program, a brilliant program giving opportunities to people who may have lost employment as a result of the pandemic and just need a leg up. But it has not been an easy road. Chris contacted me some months ago, expressing her frustration with the process and the speed of the applications. So I wanted to pass on my deep appreciation to the Minister for Employment, who worked with me to help expedite things not just for the Bridge but for all the applicants.

But there is another part to this story, and that is my constituent John. I met John last year when I attended the Office of Housing apartment building he calls home, and we worked to raise some of the maintenance issues in the building. Needless to say, I was being introduced to the group of inductees at the Bridge and it was a lovely surprise to see the smiling, familiar face of John. That is what is so important about what we do in this place. Programs like Working for Victoria are not just abstract things; they are about real people like John—and that matters. Congratulations to John, Chris and the wonderful team at the Bridge.

FELICITATIONS

Ms THEOPHANOUS: In the final seconds, I too would like to wish my community of Northcote a very merry Christmas and a safe and happy and wonderful new year.

AMY DOROTHY JEWELL

Ms WARD (Eltham) (10:34): Happy 100th birthday, Amy Dorothy Jewell. Born on 18 November 1920 in Swan Hill, third child of Joseph and Lillias Williams, Dot grew up on the family wheat farm at Lalbert. Her primary school had only eight students, and Dot has never forgotten the injustice of the school rule preventing her from riding her horse to school—she was just within the mile boundary. Like my own nan, Dot left school early because of family illness, running the family household, her three brothers and sister. A voracious reader, Dot educated herself in subjects like politics and history. Dot believes she would have made a great accountant had she had the opportunity.

At 17 Dot enrolled at Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy in Melbourne, a move Dot understood was because of her family’s guilt at the interruption to her schooling. Focusing on dressmaking as World War II began, she secured a job as a machinist at a Richmond clothing factory. Dot then met young RAAF fitter Robert Jewell. Dot always laughed at the story of Bob inviting her to the movies but not having the money to pay. He honoured his promise to pay her back. On 1 May 1943 Bob and Dot married at Swan Hill’s Methodist Church. Their son Kerry was born in 1943. Discharged in 1949, Bob returned to work in sheet metal. With a war service loan they bought land in Montmorency, also known as ‘white city’, where many of their neighbours were ex-service and the houses were built by the same builder, with the same floor plans and in the same shade of white.

Dot and Bob joined the Montmorency Tennis Club, playing many years of competition tennis. They were inaugural members of Montmorency Bowling Club. Dot, a life member, was an outstanding bowler and played A grade section 1 pennant for many years, winning the club championships on four
occasions. After 37 years in Monty they moved to Eltham’s Judge Book hostel. I wish her both a well and a happy birthday.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers

Mr EREN (Lara) (10:36): I am delighted to be speaking on this report as the chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. The referral by the Legislative Assembly for us to inquire into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers was an extremely important one not only for Victorians but indeed for a lot of the residents in my electorate who obviously have difficulties in finding a job.

At the outset, can I just thank a few people. I certainly want to thank the members of that very important committee, with a special shout-out to the deputy chair, the member for Narracan; the member for Wendouree; the member for Tarneit; the member for Northcote; the member for Sandringham; the member for Euroa; and of course the hard work—the grunt work—that is always done by the committee staff. I want to pay particular attention and pass on my thanks to Kerryn Riseley, the committee manager; Marianna Stylianou, research officer; Janelle Spielvogel, committee administration officer; and Anna Scott, committee administration officer as well.

As I indicated earlier, this report is an extremely important report which highlights some inadequacies not only in government systems but also in terms of the services that are provided to assist those people who are finding it difficult to find a job. As we know, Victoria was leading the way in terms of jobs prior to COVID. We were the engine room for jobs, and clearly when we took over in 2014 in Geelong the unemployment rate was just over 8 per cent. By 2018 it had come down to just under 5 per cent, which means that there were certain strategic things that we did through making sure that people were employed. We continue to be the engine room for jobs in the nation.

But unfortunately there are pockets of areas right across the state that are doing it really tough, like Corio and Norlane, postcode 3214, which has a population of about 33 000 people. Unfortunately even though Geelong was just under 5 per cent generally, in that postcode the unemployment rate was up to 20 per cent. Clearly there were some generational issues relating to drug and alcohol abuse, generational unemployment issues and a raft of other issues which prevent to a certain extent that cohort of community members finding a job.

We have made 70 recommendations as a committee to government. I want to thank all of those people that made submissions, both in writing and in person at the public hearings, which was so important for the committee to get firsthand experience and understand what is going on out there and to make its determinations for recommendations to government. Certainly we have made some key recommendations. The key finding of the report was how complicated the issue of joblessness is, especially for jobseekers facing disadvantage. These jobseekers experience multiple barriers to employment, such as disability, caring responsibilities and poor English, and each of their experiences is unique and varied. We realise there is no simple solution and no one-size-fits-all answer. Instead jobseekers facing disadvantage need wraparound support tailored to their specific circumstances. At the same time we need to address other barriers that they will encounter, such as lack of transport options and unconscious bias from employers. I know for a fact that—in the limited time I have left—social procurement is a wonderful way of engaging local people who find it difficult to find a job, in terms of both apprenticeships and then long-term employment associated with those projects that the Victorian government has.

I want to thank the government, obviously, for a number of initiatives that have come out of the budget, like $619 million provided for jobseekers, and most of these things announced through the budget are actually going a long way to accepting the recommendations that the committee has made: $250 million to create around 10 000 jobs; $500 million for Working for Victoria initiatives, which
has created some 11 000 jobs across the state, and that will continue and be enhanced; and of course the other initiatives that will come into play in relation to assisting those Victorians who find it difficult to find a job. So it is a great report. I thank the committee and I thank all the staff— (Time expired)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Victorian Government’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (10:41): I am pleased to rise today to speak on the report of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee entitled Inquiry into the Victorian Government’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Interim Report, which is dated July 2020 and was tabled in this place on 3 September 2020. I want to again speak on the minority report that is included at page 195, and I commend the members who signed off on that minority report and the eight findings and seven recommendations that they made.

I also note that PAEC is obviously undertaking some additional hearings in relation to this matter, and I hope that they prove to be successful. I have listened to a few of those in the last week or two, and I trust that they will continue to gain that important evidence that is needed for all Victorians, because we know as a result of the crisis that we have had here in Victoria we have had approximately 800 people pass away very tragically and sadly. To them and their families and friends we send our sympathies. We have had more than 20 000 cases. We have thousands of businesses shut down; many of those have permanently closed. We have had millions of Victorians locked up in extraordinary circumstances and their freedoms restricted in unprecedented ways. So it has been a staggering event for all Victorians, particularly during the course of this year.

I note section 5 of the minority report looks at the evidence of the Premier and the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and I note in passing, too, the fact of course that the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet has resigned. His is one of a number of resignations following the, how shall we say, inadequate evidence given by some of them and obviously their actions in relation to this particular matter. I turn particularly to paragraph 5.4 on page 202 of the minority report. To quote, it says:

> In the time since it was presented, the Premier’s evidence has in fact been proven wrong.

And so that was back then in July. And it says, down in paragraph 5.6:

> The Premier also gave evidence that:

> “… an army of people who are working in our accommodation hotels under a plan put forward by Victoria at the national cabinet to move to a compulsory hotel quarantine model, which was very quickly adopted around the national cabinet table by all states and territories. I think it has served us really well.”

We know what sort of a shambles that turned out to be and the massive cost that individuals and the broader community paid following that. And I am just hopeful, as I speak today, that the government has learned some lessons from that, because it makes you wonder when we see what happened in here yesterday with the government scrambling around introducing the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Quarantine Fees) Bill 2020. It shows how totally disorganised they are. And after all these many, many months, even the number of months since this very report was tabled, since July, you would think and you would hope that the government has learned some lessons, but sadly, as was proved to the Parliament yesterday, it appears not, because the shadow minister received an email late in the evening on Friday, 4 December—or he had received a phone call—from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services’ chief of staff saying that they have got to bring in a new bill. So we have got the government—

Mr Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, as much as the member for Forest Hill’s contribution might well be interesting or relevant to his colleagues, I do not think it really has anything to do whatsoever with the report to which he is meant to be speaking.
Mr ANGUS: On the point of order, Speaker, it clearly does, and the member obviously was not listening. I am talking about hotel quarantine, and that is in the very name of the bill that was introduced yesterday, so I think you should rule his point out of order.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I am prepared to listen further to the member for Forest Hill, but I just remind him to make sure that he relates his comments to the report that he has cited.

Mr ANGUS: Absolutely. Thank you, Speaker. So we had this catastrophic failure as identified in that report. If you turn to clause 7.2 of the minority report it outlines very clearly those failures, and they were of course the hotel quarantine failure, the contact tracing failure and the Department of Health and Human Services communication failure. I trust that the government have finally woken up and have learned their lessons, although the evidence from yesterday appears not to indicate so.

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (10:46): It is my pleasure to rise to make a contribution around the Environment and Planning Committee’s inquiry into tackling climate change in Victorian communities and the report that came out of that process. Now, I missed a period of the work on this particular inquiry due to being on paternity leave, but I was very grateful for the work of my colleagues, their excellent work, in reaching right out across the state and engaging with communities right across the state about the actions they have taken in relation to climate change. I want to thank the chair and the deputy chair. The deputy chair, the member for Mornington, did a terrific job I thought in making sure that we were able to land a bipartisan report. I think he did so in the face of some pressure from some of his colleagues who might not share his sensible, science-led view about climate change, might not share the belief that he has that we do need to respond to climate change. I was interested to see that the member for Kew was happy to put his name to this report despite attending only one meeting of the Environment and Planning Committee over the two years or so that it has been in place. That may or may not reflect the member for Kew’s views on climate change, but we would not know because he is never there to ask.

There was one particular part of the report that I was keen to sort of pick up in the discussion today, and that was in the area of our built environment and environmentally sustainable building rules. There are a number of recommendations that came through this bipartisan report, including that the government collect and publish consistent data on the sustainability performance rating of all new government construction projects, as well as upgrades of a certain size; that we establish a sustainable government buildings community of practice to collaborate on best practice; and that the Victorian government provide Victorian residential efficiency scorecard assessments for any home receiving assistance. Now, there are some challenges in this space. There are some challenges in the way in which new homes are marketed as being a particular star rating potentially and then the assessment of that, because often these star ratings are determined on a desktop basis—that is, on the basis of a design and a set of specifications of materials, cladding, insulation and the like. A certain star rating ought to be realised in the ultimate built environment, but of course there is not a building contractor in the history of time, I suspect, that has not been value-managed in some way, and what you tend to see is product substitution and the like that creates a challenge for consumers to ensure that they in fact got the, let us say, 7-star building that they paid for. And whilst we made a finding that the existing sustainability and energy efficiency rating systems for buildings are fit for purpose, there is a broader question about what purpose they ought to be fulfilling. There are a number of rating schemes, there is a lot of technical language and the sheer breadth of those rating schemes creates a challenge for governments state, federal and local to make sure that we have harmonised regimes but regimes that are clearly understood by the builders, by the consumers and by the regulators.
And in this case the interface with local council is extremely important. There would not be many local councils, I would suggest with all respect, across the state who would have the technical ability in house to conduct a detailed assessment of any building to determine its precise environmental performance. These are very technical matters. They are challenging enough to do on a desktop basis but even more challenging once a building has in fact been built, particularly where you have got circumstances where you have had to make assumptions about cladding that is ultimately behind plasterboard and the like and is not that easy to access.

So one of the recommendations we have made is that we investigate the feasibility, benefits and costs of a mandatory disclosure scheme for residential building efficiency. That would bring a disclosure scheme into the normal domain—the public domain, the highly transacted part of the property universe—which would ensure that it becomes commonplace. That I think would be a great step forward. I thank my fellow committee members for their work, and I commend the report to the house.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE


Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:51): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Report on the 2019–20 Budget Estimates. In particular I want to cover a couple of areas on ‘Agricultural exports’, 9.3.1 on page 209, and I want to speak about the agricultural exports in the context of exporting into China and the blow that we have certainly seen for wine exports in our region up in the King Valley and the Ovens Valley.

Last week I joined the member for Murray Plains, the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, with the King Valley wineries and talked about the exports and the issues that are going on for agriculture. I note in the report it talks about estimates. They are aiming for a target of $20 billion per annum by 2030, and we have certainly seen, with the way things have turned with China, it is going to make life very difficult for these growers.

King Valley, as we know, is a terrific wine region. It is certainly not one of the most recognised regions in Australia. There are others that are probably more well known, but it is very hard to match the prosecco that is grown up there. The Wangaratta-Whitfield Road—the locals call it ‘Prosecco Road’. One day we hope to change it and actually name it Prosecco Road. It is like the yellow brick road that weaves its way up to Whitfield, and it would be an absolute delight to have that called Prosecco Road down the track. It is home to 20–plus wineries. There are the bigger wineries: Brown Brothers and Sam Miranda and those big ones. Then there are the smaller ones—La Cantina, King River Estate. So there are plenty of opportunities out there. Some of them do not export, but they are still going to feel the brunt of what is happening with these tariffs from China. I mentioned Brown Brothers. They are a big exporter. Probably 40 per cent of their wines are exported, and what we now know is that even many of the wineries that are not exporting are now going to be competing on the domestic market with some of that wine that should have gone on export and will now make its way to the domestic market. We want to be very careful that the domino effect does not take place and all of a sudden it is a race to the bottom in terms of price point, and then we find some of these smaller wineries, family wineries, are competing with the big boys who literally cannot send their wine offshore because of the tariffs that we have seen.

So while we have got the ‘government for Melbourne’, as it is well known in our region, signed up to the Belt and Road deal, we are just concerned for our wineries and the costs of labour hire and production increases. They are competing in this cutthroat domestic environment where the lion’s share is the Dan Murphy’s of the world—BWS and First Choice. Again, as you start competing on the domestic scene with the bigger wineries it makes life very, very difficult. So I talk on behalf of the Aussie battlers who are struggling in this sector.

Another area I do want to just touch on in the couple of minutes that I have got left is the fruit fly that was also mentioned in the budget estimates, and we see that going forward the fruit fly plan and
strategy will be no longer. Again, I think it is important that the Minister for Agriculture understands that in our regions—in Cobram, in the stone fruit region and in other regions—it is not the farmers that do not control the fruit fly, because they do; it is the small country towns where everyone has got a veggie patch or a fruit tree in the backyard. That is where fruit fly gets out of control, not from the farmers who are doing their very level best to make sure they are fruit fly free. It is just important that we continue these programs, and if we are going to get to these targets that the minister talks about—as I said before, $20 billion annually by 2030—well, we are going to have to continue to support the farmers. And by supporting the farmers they are not saying, ‘We want cash, we want dollars in our business’; we just need you to help us to help the community in stopping the spread of fruit fly and diseases that eternally affect the farmers. This is where we need to make sure that the minister is across it, because I am not sure that she is right across it if the strategy going forward is to remove that program.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Victorian Government’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:56): I rise today to make a contribution to the tabled interim report into the inquiry into the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular I would like to commend the interim minority report, which is at page 195 of the report, to the house. As we know, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) had a series of hearings back in May and then later, after this report, in August and of course now in November–December. But I particularly want to refer to the minority report because I think so many aspects that were revealed and discussed in the minority report we are seeing come to fruition: the completely botched hotel quarantine program of this government and the lack of communication and due process by the Department of Health and Human Services—and we now know that the government has conceded how wrong it got that in putting those two departments together. They lost sight of what was happening on the ground and their communication was so poor that for so many people who had been tested for COVID and got COVID there was a complete lack of transparency around the process.

So in terms of this minority report, I definitely want to commend it to the house. Certainly, as it points out, back during the May hearings the government and the Premier were describing hotel quarantine as something good. The Premier made it clear that he had taken this concept to national cabinet and that it was all of the other states and territories around the table that took up his idea. However, still coming back to Victoria, he decided and this government decided to handle it differently to everywhere else, and we now know that Victoria is the only state in Australia that got this completely wrong. In fact I will refer you to the comments by my colleague Ms Stitt in the process of asking the Premier about hotel quarantine. She referred to it as a ‘good news story’ and sought response from the Premier about outlining the quarantining return program. But we really know that hotel quarantine was not a good news story—that it was a failure of this government.

We now know through the committee process that genomic testing found that 99 per cent of all cases can be traced back to the outbreaks in the hotel quarantine program, and it is completely the result of the failure of this government. In fact just last week in the PAEC hearings we were hearing from the government about how they are needing to set up the new COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria program. But after having had many, many months to learn the lessons from this botched program that tragically saw over 800 Victorians lose their lives, last week in PAEC we asked about this program and the government could not detail anything about the program. They had no idea about the cost—they had no idea. In fact I think only on the weekend did they realise that they needed ADF personnel to come into place. I mean, months and months and months of problems—they have known these issues, and they have taken all of this time to stand it up.

Of course I want to refer to the Cedar Meats example. Back a couple of months ago this government was saying that it had handled that absolutely perfectly—it was the first outbreak of over 100 cases through Cedar Meats. Yet we see still today that Victorians have no confidence in this new hotel
quarantine program that is again being stood up in a very short time after the government has had many months to get this right; they have no confidence that the government will get it right. I certainly hope that they have learned some lessons. Victorians deserve better from this government when it comes to managing this pandemic and the Cedar Meats outbreak, and that lack of communication is a real problem with this government.

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (11:01): I rise to speak on the report into how communities are tackling climate change in Victoria. This report was tabled by the outgoing chair, the member for South Barwon, in our last sitting week. I commend this report to the house and to the community. It is the result of a great deal of work by the committee secretariat but also by the committee chair, as I said, who has now sadly resigned from the committee to be our whip, so he has got other duties; the deputy chair, the member for Mornington; and the other members—myself, the member for Box Hill, the member for Burwood, the member for Ovens Valley and the member for Kew. But sadly we did not see the member for Kew.

During the inquiry we took evidence across the state and in town. Fortunately we were able to do most of the committee hearings and work across the state before the COVID virus hit. What we heard was that communities are taking an enormous amount of initiative themselves. They overwhelmingly believe the science in Victoria, and communities across the state are taking their own action together, whether it is with local governments or with community groups, in response to climate change.

I am enormously proud that the Environment and Planning Committee of the Legislative Assembly has been able to produce such a report and that across the aisles it is a report that is absolutely agreed. I think that Victoria is for the better that this does not seem to be a contested area, overall, around climate change; that is very good for Victorians. I particularly want to commend the member for Mornington for ensuring that it was such a collaborative report. I think most of the community do not see the committee work that is done across the aisles, and so it was great working with my great friends and members of the government but also members on the other side.

There are 38 findings and 72 recommendations in this report, and they are categorised under ‘Leadership, strategy and advocacy’; ‘Education and knowledge sharing’; ‘Community energy’—there are an enormous number of community energy projects happening in regional areas and in Melbourne; ‘Energy efficiency and buildings’; ‘Local government’, Community initiatives on water, transport, waste management and food’; ‘Agriculture and urban forestry’; ‘Disaster resilience’; and ‘Financing community climate action’.

Five minutes is not really enough time to do justice to this fantastic report, but there are a couple of stand-out communities that I really want to commend. With climate change, there is the threat of bushfires. There are flood surges, with ocean surges but also riverine flooding, and the greater number of storm events that are happening—we saw those only recently in Horsham. I want to commend particularly the communities along the coast but also those north of the divide. North of the divide, so many communities are taking action in relation to heat. I know, Deputy Speaker, you understand that, and we saw that in some of the communities in your electorate. This is a huge threat to human health, so communities are helping each other with that, local government is working on that and we have got to work together on design and look out for vulnerable people so that they are not suffering the effects of heat.

I also want to commend communities along the coast that are really making a lot of difference around East Gippsland, where they deal with the threat of fire, riverine flooding and storm surges. Some of the material in those communities is the best and it is world’s best practice. Yackandandah is another community with fantastic energy and all the other work that they are doing. I commend this magnificent report to the house.
SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (DECRIMINALISATION OF PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS) BILL 2020

Statement of compatibility


In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Bill 2020 (the Bill).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to:

- amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 and repeal offences relating to public drunkenness
- make consequential amendments to the arrest and infringement notice powers applicable to public drunkenness offences, and

In August 2019, the Victorian Government committed in principle to decriminalise public drunkenness and replace it with a health-based response. The decision was made in the context of the coronial inquest into the death of Yorta Yorta woman Tanya Day, who died after being held in police custody in December 2017 on a charge of being drunk in public.

The Victorian Government’s commitment to decriminalise public drunkenness is consistent with the final report and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) (1991), and the findings and recommendations made by the Deputy State Coroner in April 2020 in the inquest into the death of Ms Day.

As the RCIADIC found, Aboriginal people are disproportionately disadvantaged by public drunkenness laws, and overrepresented in the criminal justice system more broadly, leading to an unacceptably high rate of deaths in custody. Data also indicates that people experiencing homelessness and people from Sudan and South Sudan are disproportionately affected by public drunkenness laws. It is intended that decriminalising public drunkenness will reduce incarceration of these groups people and prevent Aboriginal deaths in custody.

An Expert Reference Group (ERG) was established to provide advice to government on the decriminalisation of public drunkenness and the design and development of a new health-based response. The ERG provided its report “Seeing the Clear Light of Day” to government in August 2020 with 86 recommendations, including repealing public drunkenness offences in the Summary Offences Act 1966 (the Act) and recommendations on the design and implementation of a health-based response.

The Bill is the first stage of work to implement public drunkenness reforms and will be followed by detailed work to design and implement an alternative public health response.

Human Rights Issues

In my opinion, the human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- the right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- the right to life (section 9)
- cultural rights, including Aboriginal cultural rights (section 19), and
- the right to liberty and security of person (section 21).

For the reasons set out below, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and does not limit any rights in the Charter.

The right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination, and section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law, is entitled to
the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. This means that laws, policies and programs should not be discriminatory, and also that public authorities should not apply or enforce laws, policies and programs in a discriminatory or arbitrary manner.

‘Discrimination’ for the purposes of the equality right means discrimination within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (EO Act). The EO Act defines discrimination in section 7 to include direct or indirect discrimination on the basis of an attribute, including, age, gender identity and sex, disability, parental status or status as a carer, and, relevantly, race.

As noted above, certain cohorts, including Aboriginal people, people experiencing homelessness and people from Sudan and South Sudan are disproportionately affected by public drunkenness laws. This highlights a significant inequity in the application of these laws. This inequity has significant costs and consequences both for those who are disproportionately affected and the broader Victorian community, because contact with the justice system is well known to be correlated with poorer outcomes across a range of social and economic indicators.

The RCIADIC asserted that the most significant contributing factor resulting in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody was the disadvantage and inequality which Aboriginal people experience in society—socially, economically and culturally. The disproportionate application of public drunkenness laws is an example of this inequality and also compounds inequality by limiting opportunities to participate and contribute to society.

For these reasons, I consider that the Bill will promote the right to equality before the law by repealing public drunkenness laws that have continued to be applied disproportionately to certain cohorts, resulting in reduced contact with the justice system for these cohorts and improved outcomes across a range of indicators.

The rights to life (section 9) and to liberty and security (section 21)

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. Under this right, public authorities have a positive obligation to protect the lives of people in their care, including from harm they do to themselves. Section 21 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to liberty and security and must not be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention or deprived of their liberty, except as provided by law. Relevant to both rights, the term ‘arbitrary’ means capricious, unpredictable or unjust, or unreasonable in the sense of not being proportionate to a legitimate aim sought to be achieved.

The RCIADIC found that the disproportionate rate at which Aboriginal people were arrested was the major and most immediate cause of the deaths of Aboriginal people in custody. Public drunkenness was found to be the most frequently reported offence, and Aboriginal people were, and continue to be, significantly overrepresented among those charged with breaching public drunkenness laws.

By reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system, decriminalising public drunkenness will reduce deaths in custody. For these reasons, I consider that the Bill promotes the right to life and the right to liberty and security. These rights will be further promoted by shifting the approach to public intoxication from a criminal justice response to a public health response, which prioritises the safety and wellbeing of people who are intoxicated in public.

As outlined below, a holistic health model is currently being developed and will be implemented before the repeal of the public drunkenness laws. This will ensure there is a response in place to meet the health needs of intoxicated people in public once the offences are repealed and will further promote the right to life, rather than limiting it.

Cultural rights, including Aboriginal cultural rights (section 19)

Section 19 of the Charter provides that people with particular cultural, religious, racial or linguistic background must not be denied the right to enjoy or practise their culture. Section 19(2) recognises that Aboriginal people hold distinct cultural rights.

The disproportionate effect of public drunkenness laws and the resulting overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system has a strong negative impact on the ability of Aboriginal people to exercise cultural rights, as outlined in section 19(2) of the Charter. The rates at which Aboriginal people are held in police and prison custody has the likely effect of further compounding losses of culture, family and purpose for a growing number of Aboriginal people because they are unable to be with their kin and the consequences of incarceration are often intergenerational.

For these reasons, I consider that the Bill promotes cultural rights. Decriminalisation of public drunkenness will reduce contact with the justice system and the work to implement a health model will provide culturally safe pathways to access social and health support. Better social and health outcomes for Aboriginal people
will also increase enjoyment of distinct Aboriginal cultural rights, including maintaining kinship ties and connection to land, identity and culture.

**Commencement of the Bill**

The Bill will commence on or before 7 November 2022 to allow time to implement a health model. A holistic health model is currently being developed and will be implemented state wide to ensure an effective service response is in place to meet the immediate and long-term health needs of Victorians, before the repeal of public drunkenness laws comes into effect. The implementation of the holistic health model alongside repealing the public drunkenness laws will further promote the right to life.

An implementation period of approximately 24 months is required to ensure that the alternative health-based response to public intoxication is funded and operational to support people who are intoxicated in public. The implementation period will allow the health model to be trialled and evaluated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the requirements for state-wide implementation.

The implementation period will also allow for meaningful consultation with key stakeholders on the design of the health model, including Aboriginal stakeholders and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities, to ensure the service response is culturally safe and meets community needs.

**Hon Jill Hennessy MP**
**Attorney-General**

**Second reading**

**Ms HENNESSY** (Altona—Attorney-General) (11:07): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into Hansard.

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

Today is a historic day for Victoria, as the government fulfils its commitment to decriminalise public drunkenness. People who are drunk in public need support, not punishment. Abolishing the offence of public drunkenness was one of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991. Until now, Victoria was one of only two states that had not yet done so, with Aboriginal Victorians still disproportionately affected by the offence.

The tragic death in custody of Tanya Day, a proud Yorta Yorta woman, nearly three years ago reignited calls for the decriminalisation of public drunkenness in Victoria from Aboriginal communities and the broader public. This call was echoed in the key recommendation of the Deputy State Coroner in the Inquest into the death of Ms Day, who in turn reiterated recommendations from numerous other independent bodies. This Bill responds to those calls by repealing the public drunkenness offences in the Summary Offences Act 1966 and related powers of arrest, as well making consequential amendments to the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 and the Bail Act 1977. It reflects the fundamental premise that no one should be placed in a police cell just for being drunk in public.

This Bill is an important milestone along a journey which acknowledges the failures of the past and the Government’s commitment to move to a better, safer future. At its core, this long-overdue reform will change the way we think about and respond to public drunkenness—moving the response away from law enforcement to an approach that focuses on health and safety. I acknowledge the tireless work of Aboriginal leaders, communities, families and organisations throughout the years who have long advocated for this change.

These offences have passed their use-by date, and belong in the distant past, where alcohol abuse was treated as a moral failing not a health issue. Nowhere is this clearer than in one of the offences removed by this Bill, that of being drunk while in charge of a carriage, a horse, cattle or a steam engine. Laws like this are relics of a less enlightened time, and it’s time we traded them in for a modern, safe, health-based approach.

We know that repealing the offences, while a crucial first step, is not enough on its own. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and other reviews since, have stressed the importance of alternative non-custodial systems, laws and services for people who are intoxicated in public. However, the Government strongly believes that legislation now is essential to solidify our commitment to reform, and to provide government entities and the community with the certainty they need to move towards the alternative model. This reform is too important to delay—by setting a clear date by which the new public health response must be in place, we are finally establishing a pathway that so many have waited too long to come into view.

We also know that people who are homeless and from particular culturally and linguistically diverse communities are, for various reasons, overrepresented in their contact with law enforcement on public
drunkenness offences. This is why, when we announced the government’s reform commitment in August 2019, we also committed to putting in place a holistic public health response.

Last year, I appointed an Expert Reference Group to provide advice to government on the design and implementation of a holistic health model to protect the safety and wellbeing of individuals who are intoxicated in public. The Group comprised: Jack Blayney, Helen Kennedy, Tony Nicholson and Nerita Waight, each a leader in their field.

The Expert Reference Group members combined their considerable expertise with extensive consultation with stakeholders across Victoria which culminated in their report, delivered to government in August this year. The report, “Seeing the Clear Light of Day”, was named in recognition of Ms Day and with approval from her family.

The comprehensive report found that the current response to public drunkenness is “unsafe, unnecessary and inconsistent with current community standards”. Repeal of public drunkenness offences features among the 86 recommendations, along with a range of other measures and considerations for the development and implementation of a holistic public health model.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the Expert Reference Group for their commitment and invaluable contribution to this important reform.

As we work through the recommendations to develop and implement the public health model envisaged by the Expert Reference Group and give effect to their intent, further legislation may be developed to help support the model. This Bill will take effect in November 2022, substantially in line with the Expert Reference Group’s recommended 24-month implementation period for the public health model. The Expert Reference Group stressed the importance of this transition period to effectively design, trial and implement a health model across the state by the time decriminalisation takes effect. We will work with the Aboriginal community and other stakeholders during this period to ensure the reforms succeed in creating a culturally responsive system for all Victorians.

With this Bill, we pave the way for people who are drunk in public to be safe and able to access appropriate care and support for their health and wellbeing, while at the same time protecting the safety of all Victorians.

Bill details


Turning to its structure:

Part 1 of the Bill sets out the purpose and commencement of the Bill. The Bill will come into effect in November 2022. The public health model to respond to people who are intoxicated in public is scheduled to be established and operating throughout Victoria.

The government acknowledges that, while the reforms are indeed overdue, the Expert Reference Group was right to guard against the risk of decriminalising public drunkenness in the absence of a fully operational alternative public health model. However, we believe that legislation to repeal the offences must be passed now, to establish a stake in the ground for reform. The legislation will provide certainty and clear expectations to service providers regarding when the public health model is to be in place.

Part 2 of the Bill provides the amendments to the Summary Offences Act 1966 (the Act) in which the public drunkenness offences are articulated.

The Bill will repeal the public drunkenness offences in sections 13, 14 and 16 of the Act.

It will no longer be an offence for a person to be drunk in a public place (section 13 of the Act). I note that this offence made up 88 per cent of all public drunkenness offences recorded by police between 2014 and 2019. Similarly, it will no longer be an offence to be drunk and disorderly in a public place, as outlined in section 14 of the Act.

The Bill also repeals section 16 which sets out two offences.

Section 16(a) makes it an offence for any person, while drunk, to behave in a riotous or disorderly manner in a public place.

Section 16(b) makes it an offence for any person in a public place to be drunk in charge of a carriage (not including a motor vehicle within the meaning of the Road Safety Act 1986) or a horse or cattle or a steam engine. Although this somewhat outdated provision may apply to a person riding a bicycle, the government considers it is appropriate that any potential reduction in road safety arising from its repeal is addressed in relevant provisions for road safety. The Department of Transport will lead any necessary policy development
work in this respect, in collaboration with the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Victoria Police prior to repeal taking effect.

The Bill also repeals section 15 of the Act, which outlines powers of arrest for both police officers and protective services officers (PSOs) for the offences of being drunk in a public place, or drunk and disorderly in a public place (at sections 13 and 14 of the Act respectively). This section is removed as a consequence of the repeal of those offences, as following their removal the arrest power has no work to do.

Consequential amendments will also be made to the Act to remove the associated powers for police officers and PSOs to issue infringements for being drunk in a public place or being drunk and disorderly in a public place under sections 13 and 14 of the Act (respectively).

Data from the Crime Statistics Agency reveals that such fines are issued by police in almost all cases.

Part 3 of the Bill makes consequential amendments to other Acts as a result of the public drunkenness offences being repealed, namely the Bail Act 1977 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998.

The offences of drunk and disorderly in a public place and behaving in a riotous or disorderly manner in a public place while drunk under sections 14 and 16 of the Summary Offences Act 1996 will be removed from the list of ‘specified offences’ under Schedule 2 of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. This will impact the provisions in Part 8A of that Act, meaning that police will no longer be able to issue a notice banning a person from a designated area or all licensed premises therein for up to 72 hours (banning notice) based on those offences. Where police have issued banning notices for public drunkenness offences, the majority are on the basis of the offence of ‘drunk and disorderly in a public place’ (section 14 of the Summary Offences Act 1966).

Similarly, although they are rarely made, the Magistrates’ Court will no longer be able to make an exclusion order for a person who is found guilty of the relevant public drunkenness offences, thereby excluding them from a designated area, or some or all licensed premises within that area for up to 12 months.

A further consequence of repeal will be that the provisions of the Bail Act 1977 which enable police to release a person from custody on payment of a deposit of $50 or less as security for the payment of any penalty that may be imposed as punishment, will no longer apply to public drunkenness offences, given the repeal of these offences.

Part 4 provides a formal repeal date given its status as an amending Bill.

Conclusion

Introducing this Bill formally recognises that public drunkenness should be treated as a health issue, not a law enforcement issue. Repealing public drunkenness offences is a critical first step to ensure people who are drunk in public are not locked up in a police cell, but are supported to access the care and services they need, thereby enhancing the health and wellbeing of the drunk person and the safety of the community as a whole. It brings Victoria a step closer to finally making these critical recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody a reality.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (11:07): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 December.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS) BILL 2020

Statement of compatibility


In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2020 (the Bill).
In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The Bill makes miscellaneous amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (the Act) to: clarify and enhance the existing duties, functions and powers of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (Institute) in relation to approving programs and courses of study that lead to qualifying as a teacher; provide the Institute with new powers in respect of approving pathway programs; provide the Institute with express powers to endorse continuing education programs; amend the Institute’s processes for investigating the conduct, competence and fitness to teach of teachers and early childhood teachers; make amendments in relation to teacher registration, including in relation to the length of time a teacher may be provisionally registered, and to provide for reinstatement of registration in some circumstances; provide for the disclosure and collection of information; increase the scope of the delegation powers of the Institute; strengthen the accountabilities of the Institute to the Minister; and make consequential and other minor amendments to the Act.

Human rights issues

Right to privacy

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides, relevantly, that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Various provisions of the Bill engage the right to privacy, as discussed below.

Provisions authorising the Institute to require or request information

Clauses 10 and 11 make amendments to the Act regarding applications for ‘provisional’ registration (that is, registration as a teacher or early childhood teacher where the applicant is qualified in accordance with the requirements of the Act except that they have not achieved, to the satisfaction of the Institute, the standard of professional practice required for registration) and reinstatement of registration where registration has lapsed. The Bill requires that applicants who have been provisionally registered for six years, and applicants for reinstatement of registration, must show that special circumstances exist in order to be granted further provisional registration or to have their registration reinstated.

Applicants may be required to disclose private and sensitive information to demonstrate that the relevant special circumstances exist. However, any interference with privacy associated with such disclosure is neither unlawful nor arbitrary, as it is authorised by the legislation and is necessary and proportionate for the purpose of (a) promoting higher standards in teaching by ensuring that a person cannot continue to be registered indefinitely where they have not demonstrated the necessary skills and capabilities unless special circumstances exist, or (b) to discourage people from allowing their registration to lapse without good reason. Further, applicants may choose what information to disclose, and are not compelled to provide any specific information. I therefore consider that the right to privacy is not limited by these provisions.

Notifications, complaints and investigations

New section 2.6.30, inserted by clause 24, requires employers of registered teachers to notify the Institute about a range of matters relating to the fitness or competence of a registered teacher in specified circumstances. This includes information about action taken against a registered teacher by an employer, information relating to charges or convictions for certain serious offences, and other matters relevant to the teacher’s fitness to teach. The Chief Commissioner of Police and the Commissioner for Children and Young People are also required to notify the Institute of certain matters relating to criminal offences and reportable conduct under Part 5A of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.

These provisions authorise interferences with the privacy of registered teachers. However, any interference is lawful (as it is authorised by legislation) and will not be arbitrary, as it is for the important purpose of ensuring that the Institute has sufficient information to effectively regulate registered teachers. This promotes the rights of children by ensuring that the Institute can take action in relation to teachers who may not be fit or competent to teach, or who may pose a risk of harm to children in their care.

Clause 24 inserts new provisions into the Act allowing complaints to be made to the Institute about a registered teacher and requiring the Institute to conduct a preliminary assessment of a notification or complaint. For that purpose, the Institute may require the complainant, the registered teacher who is the subject of the complaint, or any person who may have relevant information, to provide further information within a specified period. The Institute may use that information for the purposes of considering the notification or complaint, conducting an investigation, or performing its functions under Part 2.6. The registered teacher and the person who made the notification or complaint must be advised of the outcome of
the preliminary assessment, unless the Institute reasonably believes that doing so may seriously prejudice any investigation of the notification or complaint, place at risk a person’s health or safety, or place a person at risk of harassment or intimidation.

Clause 26 inserts new provisions into the Act expanding the Institute’s investigation powers. New section 2.6.33A requires the Institute to investigate certain matters if it suspends a person’s registration under Division 8A of the Act. New section 2.6.33AB authorises the Institute to investigate a matter relating to a registered teacher without receiving a notification in certain circumstances. Under new section 2.6.33AC, in order to determine whether to conduct a formal or informal hearing into a matter, the Institute may conduct an investigation into the matter or request the employer of the person being investigated to conduct an investigation into the matter.

Under new section 2.6.33B, where a person is being investigated, the Institute must give that person written notice of the investigation unless doing so may seriously prejudice the investigation, place at risk a person’s health or safety, or place a person at risk of harassment or intimidation (noting, however, that no disciplinary consequences may arise from an investigation without either the agreement of the person being investigated or a subsequent panel hearing).

These provisions all involve interferences with privacy, as they authorise the Institute to investigate or collect information about certain matters, authorise the provision of certain information to the Institute, and authorise the Institute to notify certain persons or entities of the outcome of their preliminary assessment or the fact that a matter is being investigated. However, any interference with privacy will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary, as the powers are authorised under legislation and are reasonable and proportionate powers necessary to enable the Institute to effectively investigate the conduct or fitness of registered teachers. These powers promote the rights of children to such protection as is in their best interests. I therefore consider that these provisions are compatible with the Charter.

Disclosure and collection of information

New section 2.6.21B, inserted by clause 18, provides that the Institute may disclose information in respect of a registered teacher or former registered teacher, or a provider of a program, unit or course of study, for specified purposes, to various bodies. Relevant bodies include any State, Territory or Commonwealth Government department or public authority, any municipal council, or a former or current employer of a registered teacher. The Institute may also collect information in respect of a registered teacher (or former registered teacher), or a provider of a program, unit or course of study, from those bodies, who are authorised under new section 2.6.21B(3) to disclose that information for specified purposes.

The relevant purposes for which information can be disclosed or collected under this provision are where the disclosure or collection is reasonably necessary for, or to enable, the Institute to perform its functions or duties, or exercise its powers, or reasonably necessary for one of the following purposes: regulating and registering schools, early childhood services or other services related to children; regulating and registering teachers and early childhood teachers; screening persons who work or are intending to work with children or vulnerable people; regulating disability services; promoting the safety and wellbeing of a child or group of children; or for any other prescribed purpose. Information may also be disclosed or collected for the purposes of research or development of national, State or Territory policy in respect of the regulation and registration of teachers.

This provision interferes with the right to privacy by enabling information to be shared by organisations, which may include sensitive personal information about teachers, such as health information or information relating to criminal records. However, any interference is lawful, as it is authorised under legislation. Further, interferences with privacy are not arbitrary, as the provision is appropriately tailored to achieve the legitimate purpose of improving information sharing that will assist with the regulation and oversight of persons and organisations holding positions of trust in relation to vulnerable persons such as children or disabled persons.

Further, the provision includes a number of safeguards to ensure interferences with privacy do not go beyond what is necessary to achieve that purpose. In particular: information disclosed or collected for the purposes of research or policy development must not include personal information, sensitive information, or health information; and where information is disclosed to an employer or former employer, that entity must collect, store and use the information in a way that protects the privacy of the persons to whom the information relates and must not use the information disclosed other than for the purpose for which it was disclosed. Further, where a receiving body is subject to any secrecy or confidentiality requirements under other laws in the receiving body’s home jurisdiction, these laws would continue to apply, which will ensure that information is managed appropriately once disclosed to the body by the Institute. I therefore consider that this provision does not limit the right to privacy.
Incorporated speech as follows:

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into Hansard.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Bill proposes amendments to Part 2.6 and section 5.2.1 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (ETRA).
Part 2.6 of the ETRA establishes the governance framework and powers and functions of the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). VIT is the statutory authority that regulates the Victorian teaching profession, including early childhood teachers.

A key purpose of the proposed amendments in the Bill is to clarify and enhance the powers and functions of VIT in relation to initial teacher education (ITE) programs that lead to qualifications for entry to teaching in schools, through amendments to Part 2.6 of the ETRA. The proposed amendments with respect to ITE programs largely strengthen the implementation of the existing regulatory framework by clarifying the extent of VIT’s powers to regulate ITE programs.

To remove ambiguity, the proposed amendments clarify the responsibilities and powers of VIT and the Minister for Education in relation to the regulation of ITE programs. They also add nuance to VIT’s powers with respect to ITE programs, which will ensure VIT is able to effectively implement, and regulate compliance with, current ITE program standards and requirements. For example, the amendments provide a clear legislative remit for the standards for ITE programs to include ITE program entry requirements, such as those in the existing Victorian Selection Framework (VSF) for entry to ITE, which includes the minimum ATAR for entry.

The amendments in the Bill will also provide VIT with the ability to implement any future reforms to raise the standards of ITE programs.

The Bill also proposes new powers for VIT with respect to the approval of programs that are identified or marketed as offering a pathway to entry into an approved ITE program (pathway programs). The Victorian Government recognises the valuable scaffolding and support that pathway programs can provide to candidates who have not obtained the minimum ATAR for direct entry to ITE programs, to develop their skills to a level preparing them for entry to ITE.

By empowering VIT to set a quality benchmark for pathway programs, the Victorian Government will make sure that programs identified or marketed as pathways to ITE provide sound foundations for their alumni to study teaching successfully. Pathway programs that are adding value in this way deserve official recognition, and students of these programs need to have confidence they will be well prepared to succeed in their future studies of ITE. Empowering VIT to set standards for and approve quality pathway programs will achieve these objectives.

The Bill also explicitly confirms that VIT has the power to endorse continuing education programs for teachers and early childhood teachers. The proposed voluntary endorsement framework will enable VIT to quality-assure continuing education programs for registered teachers and early childhood teachers, reinforcing the importance of quality-assured education programs throughout a teacher’s professional life.

With this in mind, the Bill proposes a new statutory objective for VIT: that VIT have regard to raising the quality of teaching while performing certain functions.

In relation to ITE, this Bill is designed to strengthen the quality of entrants to ITE and of teachers’ continuing education in Victoria, lifting the quality of education for Victorians far into the future. In line with the objectives of the Education State, the Bill reinforces access for diverse candidates to teaching, and embeds excellence in their training and participation in the profession.

In addition, the Bill proposes to make technical changes to section 5.2.1 of ETRA to clarify limitations on the powers that the Minister may exercise in respect of VIT.

Currently, one section of ETRA provides the Minister with general powers to set overall policy for education and training in Victoria, and to issue policies, guidelines, advice and directions to education and training institutions and statutory authorities established under the Act, however another section states that VIT must only give ‘due regard’ to ministerial advice.

This Bill proposes to clarify this inconsistency by amending ETRA to make clear that the Minister can issue a mandatory policy, guideline or direction to VIT.

This will make clear that VIT’s accountability to the Minister is the same as that of other education statutory authorities, in particular the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

This consistency with other statutory authorities will also include limitations on the Minister’s power, to ensure that the power only relates to VIT’s operations and not to VIT’s decision-making which impact on individuals. Technical amendments will also be made to clarify the Minister’s general powers in relation to issuing policies, guidelines and directions to statutory authorities.

The change will strengthen and modernise VIT’s functioning and accountability.
The Bill will also make a number of changes that will improve VIT’s efficiency and service provision to teachers by streamlining aspects of VIT’s current functions and processes. I will speak to each of these changes in turn, commencing with VIT’s processes for managing complaints and notifications.

VIT receives a large number of notifications and complaints about teachers from a number of sources, including through the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, from employers and members of the public. VIT is currently dealing with over 700 such notifications and complaints, some of which will not meet the threshold of misconduct.

To enable VIT to deal more efficiently with this case load, it is proposed that VIT be given a power to dismiss a matter that is vexatious, frivolous, misconceived or lacking in substance. This will not mean that important matters relevant to a teacher’s suitability are dismissed. VIT will undertake a preliminary assessment of each matter against a risk-based framework to decide whether or not the matter should be investigated to determine whether disciplinary action needs to be taken.

It is also proposed to amend VIT’s process for investigating complaints, notifications and matters of which VIT becomes aware through other avenues, for example, through a police check. This will involve resolving the current lack of clarity in ETRA regarding the processes for an “inquiry” and an “investigation”.

Under the proposed changes, VIT will undertake a preliminary assessment of each matter, and then determine appropriate action, which may be to proceed to an investigation which could lead to a hearing. Other matters which are less serious could be addressed through an informal hearing. These changes will enable VIT to deal more efficiently and effectively with teacher misconduct, serious misconduct and serious incompetence.

The Bill will provide the VIT Council with greater flexibility in its decision making by removing current limitations on Council’s power to delegate matters.

There are currently a few powers in ETRA that VIT is unable to delegate below the level of the VIT Council. Refusal of an application for registration and refusal to renew an application for registration are an example of powers which are subject to this limitation.

Removal of this limitation on VIT’s power to delegate will provide the VIT Council discretion to determine whether or not a particular power should be delegated below the level of Council, and if so, to whom.

This change will give the VIT Council greater control to determine which matters it should spend time on and which can be delegated, enabling Council more time to focus on the strategic direction of VIT and less on procedural matters.

The Bill will provide VIT with a power to reinstate the registration of a teacher in certain circumstances.

A teacher who does not renew their registration by the 30 September currently has a deemed period of three months during which VIT can renew registration following application from the teacher. If the teacher does not apply to renew during this period, they become unregistered.

The proposed change would provide VIT with discretion to grant a reinstatement of registration following the expiry of the three-month deeming period, and up to the next registration renewal date, that is, 30 September, where VIT is satisfied that there are special circumstances.

An applicant for reinstatement of registration will still need to meet the suitability to teach conditions and undertake a new national criminal history check.

This change will reduce administrative burden for VIT and for affected teachers as they will not be required to provide evidence of their qualifications or competence in speaking or communicating in English.

Improved information sharing powers will strengthen VIT’s already robust child safe protections. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended improved information sharing between authorities to improve child safety. The proposed new information collection and disclosure provisions will provide VIT with discretion to share information about registered teachers with interstate teacher regulatory authorities, police authorities, child safe screening agencies and employers of teachers.

VIT is subject to the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (PDP Act), has a Data Security Plan in place and will share information strictly in accordance with the Protective Data Security Framework which operates under the PDP Act.

Changes limiting to the length of time that VIT can grant Provisional Registration will enable this category of registration to operate as was originally intended under ETRA.

Provisional registration of a teacher is subject to the condition that, within two years of registration being granted a teacher will achieve the standard of professional practice required for full registration—that is, the teacher will meet the Australian Proficient Teacher Professional Standards.
However, there is currently no provision in ETRA that enables VIT to refuse a new application for registration from teachers who have previously been provisionally registered and failed to meet the proficient teacher standard. This has led to an unintended consequence where teachers who have not satisfied the requirements for full registration are able to continue teaching indefinitely under consecutive grants of provisional registration.

The proposed change will give VIT discretion to refuse a further grant of provisional registration if the applicant has previously been granted provisional registration for a total period of six years and has not satisfied the standard for full registration. VIT will have discretion to grant further periods of provisional registration beyond the six-year period where it is satisfied that special circumstances exist.

My Department has consulted key stakeholders on the reforms proposed in this Bill, including VIT, our unions and providers of ITE and pathway programs. There is wide recognition of the value in clarifying roles and responsibilities in this sector, and in the importance of quality preparation of our teachers.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (11:09): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 December.

Motions

BUDGET PAPERS 2020–21

Debate resumed on motion of Mr PEARSON:

That this house takes note of the 2020–21 budget papers.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (11:10): When I was cut short at my last contribution I was going over the significant delays to investment in desperately needed mental health beds right across the state. In fact there are a total of 11 projects that were broadly announced and celebrated last year with flashy media releases, but Labor have failed to deliver on a single project that would deliver more mental health beds to the people who need them the most. In fact there are $65.2 million of delayed projects that would have made a critical difference to people throughout the coronavirus lockdown—for people who needed that support and who were unable to get it. We certainly need to see that investment sooner rather than later. It is deeply concerning that a government that has such a level of crisis in its own mental health system that it called a royal commission and that over a year ago we saw the interim report of the mental health royal commission, with broad support in the media around supporting the recommendations, but still we have not seen any change at all. We cannot wait a moment longer to see significant reform and proper investment beyond just a flashy media release. We need to see a real difference in access to mental health in the state of Victoria. It has been heartbreaking to hear of people who simply cannot get an appointment to see a psychologist or to see a psychiatrist—these people who now have suicidal ideations. It is impacting not just on adults but on children as well, and I just urge the government to focus on that area because it is causing so much harm, not just for people today but for many generations to come.

When we look at this budget it has not been a budget that is investing in every corner of the state, as the budget papers refer to. It is not a budget that puts all people first; there are huge gaps. And while this budget has been sold as $155 billion in order to recover from coronavirus lockdowns, we are not seeing the investment in the areas that need it. The areas along the South Australia and Victoria border, the areas that have been hardest hit financially, where we have seen the most job losses, missed out in this budget. I urge the government through the announcements they have not yet made—those broad-based grants that have not been specifically allocated yet—to make it fair. Invest in our part of the state. Invest in our health services. Make sure you invest in our people and invest in our mental health services. But most importantly make sure you are governing for all Victorians, because this budget does not deliver on that.
Mr PAKULA (Keysborough—Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Racing) (11:12): It gives me pleasure to rise to speak on this wonderful budget which indeed does put people first and indeed does invest in all parts of the state, including the member for Lowan’s part of the state, which as she knows I adore. I love her part of the state.

A member interjected.

Mr PAKULA: Do not be so negative all the time. I think it was a former governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, who said that you campaign in poetry and govern in prose. Budgets are not exactly like that, but they are a little bit like that inasmuch as there are wonderful headlines and macroeconomic reforms that take place and that occur in budgets, but a lot of the real impact is at the very local level in communities where budgetary support for much-needed outcomes is provided. I want to begin my contribution by focusing on some of those outcomes in my electorate of Keysborough. The Minister for Education was in here just a few moments ago, and I want to pay tribute to him and the care and attention that he provided to many of the bids and many of the entreaties that came from schools in my electorate for support in the budget, principally among them the Kingswood Primary School upgrade. Kingswood Primary School, which is in the suburb of Dingley—and I see the member for Clarinda nodding at me at the moment; he knows the area very well—is a school that had for many years sought significant support from state budgets, and I was very pleased that in this year’s budget that primary school has been allocated $6.249 million in support to upgrade and modernise the school. I want to congratulate the school council and the principal, Aaron Cox, for their tireless advocacy for that school over many, many months and indeed many years. It was a great pleasure for me to be out there a few weeks ago with the school captains, Mathias and Cerin, and to celebrate that announcement and the wonderful upgrades that will be provided to that school as a consequence of that announcement.

There has also been support through the minor capital works program for Keysborough Primary School and Keysborough Gardens Primary School, Keysborough Gardens being a brand new school which only opened at the start of this year, and already support through a combined total of $320,000 to fast-track projects at those two schools. So what are already a couple of wonderful schools will be made even better by that support.

There has also been support for the revitalisation of the activity centre at Noble Park as a result of this budget. I remember a couple of years ago being with the member for Clarinda and the Premier at Noble Park after what is now being colloquially referred to as sky rail first went up there and noted the way that that work had reunited a Noble Park community which had been divided by the railway line for so long. The revitalisation of the Noble Park shopping centre as a consequence of that grade separation has already been profound, but these works will enhance that work that is already underway and will ensure that the beautification works that are happening underneath the railway line, the additional parking and the additional greenery, will only be better and better. So that is another wonderful outcome for our community as a consequence of the budget.

The last thing I just want to mention is Braeside Park, which is a magnificent community asset in the electorate of Keysborough, one that is enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors every year. The visitor facilities there are a little on the aged side—they have been there for a long, long time—and the budget provides funds to upgrade the visitor facilities within Braeside Park. It will provide safer access and more equitable access and facilitate community exercise and wellbeing, and I think that that will be welcomed by not just the community within the Keysborough electorate but all of those people that come from far and wide to enjoy the beauty of Braeside Park.

This budget has been remarkably positive for local communities, but beyond that it is a budget which is all about bringing jobs back to Victoria, generating economic recovery and putting people first—and that is what it does unashamedly. If I was a member of the federal cabinet, I probably would have used the term ‘comeback’ 27 times by now in this speech, because that is the word du jour for the federal ministry it seems, based on the last couple of days of question time. But this budget does not
need catchwords, does not need slogans; it stands on its own two feet as a consequence of the work that it does and the funds that it provides to generate economic activity in this state.

I have been very fortunate that it is in my portfolios that much of that activity takes place. In terms of tourism, sport and major events, a $465 million boost for the visitor economy is the biggest boost that the tourism sector has ever had in a state budget, and it is not just about the $150 million fund that will be a contestable fund which will enable great projects from right around Victoria to get up and to generate not just economic activity in their construction but economic activity in the attractions that they create and the increased desire they will generate for Victorians to visit those parts of the state. There is already $149 million in tourism infrastructure which has been outlined as part of the budget, and that is genuinely all over Victoria.

Without going into all of the numbers, there is support for improvements at Wilsons Promontory to increase capacity with more accommodation and better visitor facilities and support for the upgrade of facilities and infrastructure along the Great Ocean Road. I have walked part of the coastal trail there. I think I did the stretch from Torquay to Anglessea—a remarkable attraction down there—but this supports the extension of that trail from Fairhaven to Grey River. It also provides additional camping locations and upgraded visitor facilities, like toilets, viewing platforms and parking.

We are upgrading the Mallee Silo Art Trail, including some major works at Rainbow. If you have not been around that Silo Art Trail and seen some of the incredible not just paintings but projections that go onto some of those silos, it really is an opportunity to get around a part of Victoria that a lot of Melburnians never get to, and this will make it even better.

The Falls to Hotham alpine crossing work—$15 million—is going to be transformational for that part of our alpine resort network, and it is, I think, a recognition of the fact that for the long-term future of the alpine resorts they need to become year-round attractions. With climate change we are seeing our snow seasons get shorter and shorter, and there are a lot of businesses on those mountains that simply need more than a couple of months worth of activity throughout the year. Those mountains are magnificent attractions, snow or no snow, and we need to build the infrastructure and the facilities along those trails to make them year-round attractions. This is really one step towards doing that.

We are upgrading the walking and cycling tracks along the Murray. There is a lot of support for the Gippsland region—the building of eco-pod accommodation at Cape Conran, helping to establish the hot springs at Metung and the spa and eco resort at Nunduk through some infrastructure. They will all be great reasons for people to visit that part of Victoria—a part of Victoria that was really badly affected by fire at the beginning of this year. I myself stayed down at Paynesville. We are providing some additional support for the koala sanctuary at Raymond Island as part of this budget package. Paynesville is already a magnificent destination. We provided some support for the upgrade of the boardwalk down there earlier in the year through some of the recovery packages that we have already announced, and this will make that part of the state even more attractive to visitors. I could go on about all of those tourism infrastructure projects—Prosecco Road up in the High Country, where I was a few weeks ago; the new National Centre for Photography in Ballarat—but all in all the works that we are doing to support the visitor economy are very, very significant.

And apart from those things that I have already mentioned, the fact that we have now got four years of dedicated funding for the Regional Events Fund rather than that year-to-year funding that they have been enduring for the last little while I think is very important, because it allows local government areas and the proponents of those attractions to bid for multiyear event funding rather than just for a year at a time. So that is a significant outcome from the budget, as indeed is the fact that we have increased the Major Events Fund from $62 million a year to $100 million a year as a consequence of this budget. We know that other states and territories would love to grab our suite of major events. We know that we need to invest more to ensure that we see off not just Sydney and Brisbane but Singapore and Japan and other parts of our region that look longingly and jealously at our major events calendar. I was really gratified to read this morning in the paper that we are likely to see tickets go on sale before Christmas.
for both Harry Potter and Come from Away. Those theatre shows are wonderful not just for theatre aficionados but for the accommodation sector and the restaurant sector in the CBD, which benefit from people coming in for those shows. Hopefully we will see them up and running in the new year.

Moving away from tourism, sport and major events, the work that is being done in what I would broadly define as the industry support and recovery portfolio—but also indeed in the small business portfolio, which is overseen by my friend Minister Pulford, and indeed in the Treasurer’s portfolio in his capacity as both Treasurer and as Minister for Economic Development—is substantial. The med tech manufacturing sector with a $20 million investment—that is something that is so profound as part of this budget, because not only has this pandemic demonstrated the need to have some surety of local supply chains in terms of medical technology, personal protective equipment and the like but it really is a demonstration of the need for sovereign manufacturing capability and a demonstration of the fact that we need to be able to turn our wonderful medical research into commercialised outcomes. We are brilliant at research. We have not been so great in the past at turning that into great Australian companies, into jobs and into products that keep people healthy, and the med tech manufacturing sector will be a new hub that will put us at the forefront of med tech, innovation and design.

We have committed $60 million to create a new Manufacturing and Industry Development Fund. That will focus on growing medical products and medicines, but other key industries as well—industries like food manufacturing because we are at the absolute epicentre of clean, green, fresh food in this state. We have great opportunities for export but also to supply the domestic market. That fund will help ensure our pre-eminence in that regard remains in place.

We have also committed $40 million through an Industry Recovery and Growth Fund, and that is all about attracting new investment and creating more jobs in some really crucial areas where we already believe we have a competitive advantage and where we believe the jobs of the future are going to come from—manufacturing, clean energy, digital technology, regional tourism and many, many others. They are the keys to generating the jobs of the future, and that dedicated Industry Recovery and Growth Fund will go a long way towards doing so.

Almost more significantly than all of that, though, is the announcement made by the Treasurer of the $2 billion Breakthrough Victoria Fund, because that is the fund that is going to see the turbocharging of investment from the private sector, the turbocharging of innovation and converting that innovation into commercialised outcomes, turning startups into medium-size companies and then into unicorns—into big companies—because that fund will drive investment in research, innovation and next-generation breakthroughs over the next decade. It is going to be an extraordinary opportunity, with a couple of hundred million dollars every year for that research and technology to be generated in this state. That, along with the $25.7 million that we are investing over the next four years for the Venture Debt Fund, will see government co-invest with new companies to get them off the ground and find new opportunities.

This truly is a budget which is not just about putting back the jobs that have been lost throughout the pandemic, although there will be an enormous amount of those jobs generated back in hospitality, back in tourism, back in events, but is about using this opportunity to ascertain, to discover and to generate the jobs of the future, the jobs that will be the cornerstone of the Victorian economy for decades to come. We have not let that opportunity slip. We have delivered a budget that invests heavily in those areas, and Victoria will benefit for a long, long time.

Mr Hodgetts (Croydon) (11:28): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2020–2021) Bill 2020, otherwise known as the budget, and I wish to use my contribution to speak about the projects being delivered in my electorate after much hard work—lobbying and advocacy work—to get them in front of government and secure the funding to see them come to fruition. Then I will use the rest of my contribution to speak about the many needs and priorities that still require support, funding and backing to see these worthwhile projects get up for the benefit of the local community.
Now, of course I would much rather be in government on the Treasury benches, having a greater say in the allocation of resources towards the many needs, wants and priorities of my electorate. However, I am living proof that a local member can work constructively towards getting the attention of the government, putting worthwhile projects forward, arguing the case and securing the funding for these projects in my electorate—successful advocacy that I am proud of. I am pleased to have delivered these projects which will benefit my local community for years and years into the future.

Whether it is lobbying for state or federal funding, I am thrilled to have worked towards the following projects and funding being delivered. So far one on the list is Pembroke Primary School maintenance. We know the fantastic work that Megan Ganter, the principal out at Pembroke Primary School, does. In 2017 we saw a $2.2 million upgrade for new classrooms, a new STEM room and a new library. Megan leads a fantastic group of teaching staff out there. I am always in batting for and supporting my local primary schools and I am pleased to see that Pembroke Primary School will share, having gone through that major upgrade of $2.2 million in 2017, in part of $6.5 million towards much-needed school maintenance that will make Pembroke Primary School the attraction it is to local students out there. So well done to Megan Ganter, the principal there, working towards getting that school maintenance funding.

Maroondah SES have been the recipient of $300,000. We all know the fantastic work that our SES volunteers do. Maroondah in particular is one that I am fairly close to. I know some of the terrific work that they do out there. They serve our community 24/7. They are highly skilled, well equipped, well trained, so it is fantastic news to see $300,000 being given to Maroondah SES to support the volunteers in all the wonderful work they do serving our local community out there.

The Croydon Community School rebuild: now, that is a little over $18 million—$18.123 million I think is the figure, a little over $18 million. Croydon Community School is a fantastic local community school in my electorate. It has done some wonderful work over the years. They provide young people with an alternative experience at secondary school. The current school is located on Mt Dandenong Road in Croydon, and it has got some restrictions on its space. They need to expand. So the old Croydon Secondary College site on Croydon Road—we went through a long history there where that school was vacated and became the site of Melba College, and we secured two lots of funding for a brand new redevelopment there—was vacant. What happened here is it got left vacant and attracted some undesirable elements of the community who have vandalised and squatted and really destroyed the school, much to the horror of the local neighbours who have had to put up with this for many months. So we worked hard over time with the minister and with the government to get that site clean—the old school demolished. I am now pleased that that $18 million will see Croydon Community School—a brand new facility built on that former Croydon Secondary College site, which of course then leaves the current Croydon Community School site vacant, a great building that is I think heritage listed. So we will work again with the local community to see what we do with that site—possibly a community house or something like that.

Mooroolbark Soccer Club has been the recipient of funding. Now, I share that with the member for Evelyn. It is physically located in the electorate of Evelyn, but many of my community play soccer there. So they have secured funding for new junior synthetic pitches and a female-friendly change room. We argued long and hard for this. In this day and age we only had male change rooms, and the female players had to sit in their cars and get changed in their cars or indeed walk through the male change room to the toilets to get changed. It was totally unacceptable in this day and age, and particularly with the growth of women’s soccer. Mooroolbark Soccer Club is a fantastic local club that fields senior men’s, senior women’s and junior teams. So they are getting brand new synthetic pitches for the juniors and female-friendly change rooms. I have driven past there a number of times. That development is coming along—it is first class.

Croydon City Arrows Soccer Club at Dorset reserve is getting $2 million for a redevelopment: a double-storey pavilion, six change rooms, a first-aid room, a canteen, public toilets and a great storage area. It will have an upstairs with balcony and office space, and that will look over the grass pitch, a
new synthetic pitch, and a warm-up court and volleyball court. So again, we have worked long and hard with Croydon City Arrows at the Dorset reserve, and I am very pleased for them to be getting that funding.

Silcock Reserve—another great sporting club. It is home to the Croydon Ranges Football Club, Croydon Ranges Cricket Club and the Croydon & District Obedience Dog Club. They are getting a brand new pavilion. It is a wonderful asset in our local community. They are getting a brand new pavilion. It has got a playground, barbecues and walking tracks. It is a lovely treed area there—wonderful to walk along. I often will go for a walk at lunchtime up around Silcock Reserve. It is a large sporting reserve. They have got about $250,000. Back when we were in government I got $20,000 or $30,000 for a master plan for the site. They are getting $250,000 and another $125,000 for lights. They need about $1 million, I think—the local council—to complete that project, so we will continue to work with them. But that will be a great asset there.

Ruskin Park Primary School is getting $9.5 million. Again, Andrew Moore, the principal there, leads a dedicated teaching staff. It is a terrific local school about 2 kilometres east of Croydon Central. So it is fantastic to see Ruskin Park getting $9.5 million towards upgrades and their facilities there.

The Croydon railway station multilevel car park: now, I could speak about this for a long time, but I do not have enough time. It has got federal funding from our member for Deakin, Michael Sukkar. Parking in and around Croydon has been a bugbear for many years—trying to get all-day parking, short-term parking for traders. My office is in Main Street, Croydon. So we got that $15 million of federal funding to do a multilevel car park in Croydon. It is well underway. It will be finished some time next year. It will be terrific to see parking eased in Croydon, and those that want to catch the train in to work will be able to be the beneficiaries of all-day parking there. So well done to the federal member, Michael Sukkar, the member for Deakin there.

We have got funding for the duplication of Dorset Road—$50 million. It is a tricky project, that single lane from Hull Road all the way through to the Bellara Drive and Maroondah Highway, so to get that $50 million is fantastic.

We are seeing the redevelopment of the Springfield park clubrooms—long overdue—home to the Croydon Rangers Gridiron Club. They are a fantastic club, very successful in their competition. Those are very old facilities there, so there are going to be state-of-the-art clubrooms there with the funding we have got.

We are getting upgrades to each end of Tortice Drive, with a roundabout at Warrandyte Road and traffic lights at Wonga Road—about $550,000 of again federal funding; a great project long overdue there, and I have been lobbying for that for quite a while—and upgrades of $2.5 million to Plymouth Road, again federally funded.

And of course we saw for the intersection of Dorset Road, Bellara Drive and Maroondah Highway some $8 million of federal funding there. So with the many, many projects I have lobbied for, worked hard for—whether it is state, federal or local government funding—it is terrific to see them delivered in the local community.

Now, there are still plenty of projects that we are fighting for and I am fighting for, advocating for and trying to get in front of government for funding. I would love to see some money go to Yarra Road Primary School. They need their toilets upgraded and some shade cloth, I think, from the last time I talked to the principal up there, so I will work with them to try and get that before the minister and before the government to get some funding there.

Ainslie Parklands Primary School, a fantastic local primary school—with principal Brett MacKenzie—we were out there recently. In fact the minister came and visited that primary school recently. We got some money, $271,000, for a playground upgrade, but we need some significant money to inject into that school to finish the upgrade and rebuild there. There is a whole precinct there,
with Melba Secondary College, the Ainslie Parklands oval, the cricket club and the new basketball facilities there. If the primary school can finish getting upgraded it is going to be a fantastic area for that whole precinct, so it was great to have the minister out there to show him what the school can offer and what its needs are.

The Mooroolbark Heights Reserve clubrooms, the home of the mighty Mustangs and Mooroolbark Cricket Club need an upgrade. We have had some success in getting a lot of clubrooms and sporting clubs in the electorate upgraded. Croydon South is another one we got upgraded, but the Mooroolbark Heights clubrooms are well and truly next on the list. They had some minor upgrades a number of years ago. They have got some great teams in there, and we actually need some significant money to inject there. I will lobby the Minister for Community Sport, who is at the table now. I note she is taking great interest in it, so Minister, I will give you some further details on that and invite you out if you wish to have a look at the fantastic clubrooms there.

There is the Dining Room Mission that provides meal services to disadvantaged in our community. There have been small amounts of money there we have been able to get in the past, but they are in need to keep going. They feed 80 to 100 people and growing numbers. They do some terrific work in the local community, as does Elisha Care, a terrific local organisation that helps those less fortunate in our community; it gets them into employment and assists them, supports them.

The Babes Project, run by Helen Parker, provides pregnancy support services. It has got an office in Croydon and actually opened an office in Frankston. The member for Frankston attended that launch. They do some wonderful work, but again they are always in need of support and funding to deliver the much-needed services, perinatal and pregnancy support services, to young mums and people in our community, so I will continue to lobby for the Babes Project to receive their much-needed funding.

I mentioned on the adjournment, I think it was last week or the week before, the East Croydon Kilsyth Tennis Club synthetic courts. There have had a couple done. The club is in touch with the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events or will be in touch with the Minister for Community Sport; they have got a connection there or a contact there. It would be a great asset to the local community. We all like to see bipartisan efforts to fund local sporting clubs, so I will continue to bat for that much-needed funding for the last couple of courts at East Croydon Kilsyth Tennis Club on Hull Road.

The Croydon and Ringwood East level crossing removals, you know, are next on the list. We are getting Mooroolbark and Lilydale done, but yes, probably another $240 million according to Maroondah City Council is required to get those level crossings removed. I know Croydon is a high priority for Maroondah City Council because they want to work with some local roads and reconfigure some traffic movement around there. So we will continue to talk about that and consult with the community about what that might look like.

Duplication of the rail line between Mooroolbark and Lilydale—I know the member for Evelyn has been a big supporter of that and has mentioned it in here a number of times with the development of Kinley estate and the amount of homes and people that are going to be injected into the local community there, so the duplication of the railway line between Mooroolbark and Lilydale would be a terrific piece of infrastructure that would benefit the local area.

Last election I lobbied hard for the Maroondah Highway, Kent Avenue and Yarra Road intersection—some $4.6 million. Again, I think it is number one on the Maroondah City Council’s road priorities. It is a difficult intersection. It requires an upgrade to improve the intersection in terms of safety, so we will continue. We did not get it up—we obviously did not get up at the last election—but I will lobby for that with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the government to try and get that funding to have that intersection at Maroondah Highway, Yarra Road and Kent Avenue done. There is the intersection of The Gateway and Dorset Road. Safety improvements there are much needed. We have worked with the local community there. It would give them no greater joy than to have that intersection upgraded, where there have been accidents and indeed a fatality.
On continuing to fund sporting clubs and their volunteers to help them recover from COVID, I know the government has put some money in the budget for that, but some sporting clubs—yes, they like the uniform grants and the equipment grants—at the moment I think really need an injection to support their volunteers to help them recover after a season or a year without much sport, so we will continue to lobby for that. And finally, the Croydon community precinct sport and recreation hub and bowling greens, a project from Maroondah City Council. There is $3 million from state government. A total of $7.5 million is needed for the project, so we will continue to work towards and lobby for that.

In conclusion, as I said at the outset, I would much rather be in government, on the Treasury benches, having a greater say in the allocation of resources towards the many needs, wants and priorities of my electorate. I have demonstrated that hard work, lobbying and advocacy can deliver the funding for local projects and I am pleased with the achievements to date. As always, there is more to do and a long list of priorities that I will continue to work hard towards. I will continue to lobby, promote, push, press the case, argue and advocate for much-needed funding for these local community priorities in a positive, constructive and progressive way for the benefit of all members of my electorate and my local community and these very, very worthwhile projects.

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (11:42): It is my great pleasure to rise and speak on the take-note motion for the budget, and I would like to begin my contribution by saying something which I hope will not be too controversial or unwittingly offend our wonderful Treasurer, who along with his team has done a tremendous amount of work to deliver this state budget. I would like to begin by saying that the 2020–21 Victorian state budget is unremarkable. It is unremarkable because fundamentally it is the continuation of five successive state Labor budgets which have been handed down with the same vision and the same determination, and that is to continue to build jobs and opportunities for Victorians and to reform our state to be stronger and fairer. This budget is no exception.

This budget, like those before it, invests in Victorians. It leverages the power of the Treasury benches to build the infrastructure, deliver the services and create the jobs Victorians need, and that is a continuation of our values as a Labor government and our program of prosperity aimed at making the economy work for Victorians, not at the cost of them. What is extraordinary is the scale of this budget, the scale of reform, because out of the heartache and destruction of the health pandemic we have been presented an opportunity. We have a moment in time, and this government has made the choice to grasp that opportunity and that responsibility with both hands. We have made the choice not to retreat from public spending to chase surpluses but to put Victorians first and indeed lift Victorians up and imagine an even greater future for our state. At the centre of those efforts is our jobs plan, a plan that will see 400,000 jobs created by 2025 to drive our economic recovery, a plan that will actively help people find a new job, particularly for Victorians hardest hit by this pandemic, including women, young people, retrenched workers and people who have been long-term unemployed. Because the truth is that this year has been like no other. Both employers and employees have suffered and so too have jobseekers.

I have seen this throughout my own community in Northcote, where people working in hospitality, creative industries, education, retail and so many more have lost income and been thrown into uncertainty. The lived reality of that is no small thing. These are people in my community who have been set back in their goals and in their dreams. Maybe they were saving to buy a home, maybe they were working to support their studies, maybe they were on the cusp of expanding their business. Maybe they were just making ends meet.

We cannot quantify the emotional toll either, but we do know how much a stable job means for giving people meaning, dignity and security. Victorians have been extraordinary in their resilience. Yet our praise for that should not surpass our recognition of their heartache, and inherent in that recognition must be action. In this budget we well and truly have action. Because I say this: the pandemic has revealed some deep fractures in our society and our economy. They have been there for a long time, but this year has brought them into relief. And it is with absolute pride that I can say that our response
to these cracks has not been to shirk away from them but to confront them head-on and use the opportunity we have in this moment to make real, tangible reforms for our state.

There are so many initiatives in this budget which I could point to which demonstrate this: helping families to juggle it all by covering the cost of kinder next year and expanding before- and after-school care; the enormous $868 million to start fixing our mental health system and get more Victorians the support they need; the $1 billion investment in TAFE training that will mean 80,000 new training places over the next four years to give more people that leg-up that they need; our Big Build, which will see transformational projects like the Suburban Rail Loop and the link to the airport, which has only ever been spoken about but which we are delivering; a secure workers scheme, which for the first time will give insecure workers access to paid sick leave, a reform that I hope the federal government will take note of and follow our lead because it is too important not to; our $2 billion Breakthrough Victoria Fund, which will mean research and innovation through our institutes, our businesses and our inventors can stay right here in Victoria and set our state up as a hub of prosperity across medical research, clean energy, digital tech and agriculture; our incredible and unprecedented $1.6 billion to make Victoria a renewable energy powerhouse, including solid steps to reduce demand for household gas usage, something which I have been working on with the minister and am very proud to see progressing.

Each one of these announcements is newsworthy and groundbreaking, but I want to pause and speak in particular about our $6 billion Big Housing Build, because this is something which will mean so much to so many: 12,000 new social and affordable homes over the next four years; 10,000 construction jobs per year over the next four years. This is an unprecedented investment, the biggest investment in social housing our state has ever seen. It is not just bricks and mortar; this is transformative. It is about lifting people up, giving them opportunity, breaking the cycle of poverty. That is something which has generational impact—thousands of Victorian lives made better, families made safer, a chance for more Victorians to pursue their aspirations. It goes to the heart of our Labor values—values which we will always, always stand by. And importantly, unlike some who prefer slogans and marketing campaigns, we will get on with delivering these homes. We will not use this as a virtue-signalling opportunity and then put roadblocks in front of the implementation, a tactic I have seen all too often in my community by the Greens political party in relation to social housing projects. They will say they support more homes but when it comes to enabling it, when it comes to actually seeing these homes being built to give people opportunity and hope, it is all protest and obstruction. I am so proud of this government. Our government has used this opportunity and this moment in time to make these homes possible—to make safety and security possible.

This budget has delivered real impact for the Northcote electorate. From day one I have made securing school upgrades a priority, and I am thrilled to see that three more schools in our suburbs are receiving funding in this budget. The next stage of the Thombury High School master plan will now commence, delivering a brand new centre for science, technology, engineering, arts and maths, complementing the beautiful new gymnasium and performing arts centre that was completed earlier this year. Stage 2 of the Bell Primary masterplan will be delivered, giving the school and the local community a multipurpose hall and, more importantly, a place where for the first time the school will be able to come together under one roof. And Croxton School, a beautiful school that creates genuine pathways for young people with an intellectual disability, will continue its transformation with the next stage of its classroom upgrades. I have to thank all three principals, Michael Keenan, David Twite and Bev Fegan, and the school councillors who have worked with me to get these over the line.

But we know that schools are not just about facilities. They are about nurturing our young people to be confident, curious and self-determining individuals with the skills and opportunities they need to reach their potential. That is why I have been particularly proud to see in this budget such a substantive emphasis on supporting teachers and students. We are putting more than 4000 tutors in schools across Victoria to help those who need an extra hand. We are funding new jobs, skills and pathways coordinators in government secondary schools to give kids the expert advice and linkages they need
to undertake training. We are completely transforming and expanding support for students with disabilities in schools, including those with autism and dyslexia.

As I said, this budget does not retreat. This budget is bold, it is big and it is what Victoria needs to recover from this pandemic and to build a stronger and fairer state, because ultimately budgets come down to choices—choices about where to invest, where to prioritise and where to create opportunity. We have seen what the federal Liberal Party has prioritised this year, and it is certainly not Victorians. This budget puts Victorian families and Victorian businesses first. It builds on our strengths and it puts us on a path to come out of this better than we were before, to restore our economy, to grow jobs, to reform and to invest in ways that fundamentally make Victorian lives better.

Now, I know that those opposite do not like to compare Victoria to other parts of the world—of course it does not suit them—but I cannot help but consider how things might have been different for us if a different approach were taken. I reflect on the statements made by the highly respected science writer and Pulitzer Prize winner Laurie Garrett, who recently said this about the situation in the US:

… I studied the status of public health all over the United States regarding pandemics and US response. The one thing we never role-played was the idea that the government itself would be the primary problem. We never anticipated a government that would have no clear messaging, no strategy, no actual primary intent to stop the microorganism.

There were those right here in Victoria who did not think it was possible for Victorians to achieve what we did in suppressing the virus. There were those right here who at every turn were undermining the public health advice, playing doomsday politics. The truth is that Victorians achieved what they did in spite of those voices. Together we stared down the doubt and conspiracy theories and stubbornly followed the health advice. And guess what? It turns out the health advice was right. Almost to the day we hit our targets to get to zero cases, just as the Premier and the chief health officer indicated.

The pandemic is not over and the economic impact of putting lives first is not over, but with this budget Victorians have every reason to be optimistic about the future, because this is a budget that recognises the substance of Victorians—our potential, our unwavering ability to dig deep, innovate, adapt and improve. Since 2014 our government has created over 500 000 jobs. We will use that expertise, that experience and that determination to again grow jobs and to set Victoria up for the future. This budget is just the beginning of that process. As I said at the start of this speech, it is a continuation of what we started when we came into government and a continuation of our Labor values and our program of prosperity for this state.

I want to commend and thank the Treasurer and the Premier on this budget which delivers so many benefits to my community. Whether that is jobs creation; school upgrades; road upgrades; more and better health care; training to give people opportunities; kinder upgrades, but also improvements to service delivery; tax breaks for businesses; or clean energy and real steps towards a renewables future, this budget will have tangible impacts on every Victorian, including those in my community. It has been a really tough year, and as we head towards Christmas I want to thank every person in my community who has pulled together and come through this year with resilience, strength, grace and integrity, because we could not have done it without every single one of them—the schoolteachers, the kinder teachers, the childcare workers, the workers in our supermarkets, the cleaners, the cooks, and every community organisation that pulled together to help those in need, including our neighbourhood houses. It has been extraordinary to see and a privilege to serve them this year, and this budget gives each and every one of them hope about the future and opportunities for the future. I am really, really looking forward to what it is going to mean going forward into next year. Not to put too much pressure on our Treasurer, but I am really looking forward to what the next budget will bring.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (11:56): I rise to deliver my budget reply, and I will begin by saying we have got some good news finally. After six long years of advocating to the government the importance of South West Healthcare to the region, we have $384 million to complete the second stage of the hospital, so it is fantastic news.
I joined the CEO in a Zoom meeting the other night to pay tribute to all the people who had contributed to the advocacy and the hard work to get the project in front of the government so that we could stand here today and be thanking those people in the community who worked so hard. It was great to be recognised too by the local CEO, Craig Fraser, for the work that I did advocating for the hospital. Obviously it is a very important project for me, having trained in that hospital, having worked in that hospital and having a deep understanding of how the staff in accident and emergency particularly and also theatre have been putting up with some pretty cramped and difficult environments to deliver the fantastic results that they do under those circumstances.

Congratulations to the whole team at South West Healthcare. Your hard work and your persistence have paid off. There will be some challenging times over the next couple of years or so whilst the works take place. I remember being part of that when the intensive care was revamped at Warrnambool actually, and it is a challenging time. It is very good news for the Warrnambool community but also for the entire south-west, because this is the facility that needs to be the base—that is why it is called the base hospital—so that we can have decent health care for the whole of the region.

Whilst it was terrific to have such good news, I was surprised to see that with the borrowings of $155 billion, which I completely understand given we need to kickstart the economy, we did not have increased budget in the road sector. As the Shadow Minister for Rural Roads, I know that I have brought up in this place—just like I did with the hospital—the importance of the regions having a modern transport network that actually meets the demands of the communities who service Victoria with the goods that they produce and take down to the ports of Melbourne, Portland and Geelong to export. These roads are just not up to that standard. When we see in the budget a similar amount towards just maintenance of the roads like we saw last year, it is quite disappointing, because as Infrastructure Victoria, who released their report again today, said in their last report, investing in regional roads is a way to actually make sure we get good results for jobs in the local economies. It is imperative.

The community of South-West Coast and the communities of regional Victoria right across the state will be very shocked to see that this opportunity was missed, because we all know that regional roads are in a very poor state. We want to see our families getting home safely, and we want to see our kids on the school bus getting to school without the bus drivers being frightened of the task they have at hand, which is what I get reported to me quite a bit nowadays.

Princes Highway west in my part of the world is a project that we were really sure would be in this budget, because the federal government has given half the money and said, ‘Just match it, or just give a contribution, and let’s get on with getting that Princes Highway west done’. It is an absolute need, not want, and unfortunately there was nothing in that. But I hope the government will reconsider—there is some money that they have available to them within the budget that is not allocated—some of those projects.

I hope they do come out to the regions. With the hospital, I brought the shadow minister out, Georgie Crozier, and prior to her the shadow minister, Mary Wooldridge. We did not see Labor come out with such enthusiasm. We did eventually see the last Labor minister, Jenny Mikakos, come out in the 12 months prior to announcing the hospital, and prior to that the previous health minister took a couple of years to come out to the regions. And it is the same with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety: it would be great if he could get out into the regions. You know, come out to South-West Coast, come out to the border communities like Nelson, who have really missed out in this budget and who are asking for some respect for the fact that they need their roads invested in, because the further away you get from Melbourne, it is quite a fact that you hit the poorest roads, and when you hit the border with South Australia—beautiful roads. So there is something going on, and I think if perhaps the minister could come to visit and have an experience he will find out for himself that this is not a want, this is a need.

The other disappointment with the budget was the fact that there was no funding for the Lookout project, a project in Warrnambool that is shovel ready and has the community behind it from the point
of view that they have actually put their hands in their pockets and raised money. It is a project that is most needed. It is a project that will deliver rehabilitation drug beds to people who have made the commitment to turn their life around and just need that period of time post detox to actually get that reset time to change their habits and work through some new life experiences so that they can break that habit. So it is a real shame when you have got a community behind it, you have got people motivated and they want to stay around their families and they cannot because we have got no rehabilitation beds available. Again, I am hoping the government will reconsider. Clearly in this day and age with the pressures of mental health issues and drug addiction—that do not always go hand in hand but sometimes do—and with what has been going on we really need some support there for our community members.

The other really interesting part of this budget was in my shadow portfolio responsibility area of freight. There was absolutely not one dollar allocated to any freight investments. The port rail shuttle network project sits idle. When you look at the fact that the government talks about commitment to getting trucks off the road, particularly in the suburbs of Melbourne, you have to ask yourself: where is the real commitment here? We have got the Murray Basin rail project, which the government have botched completely—$440 million has gone into the project, and instead of that being the amount that was needed to deliver it, what they have ended up with is a project that is actually worse than when it was started. So trains coming from Mildura, I think it is, down to Bendigo will actually get there slower than prior to the project beginning. The minister has completely stuffed this project, and she is ignoring all of the regional communities who are saying, ‘This will be good for farmers, this will be good for export dollars, this will be good for income for Victoria’. That is ignoring the fact that there are 134 000 trucks that will be needed to take the grain harvest this year down to the port for export. So can you imagine how many trucks are going to go hurtling through the suburbs of Melbourne? I think there is a lot of goodwill in the farming community and there is a lot of goodwill in the Melbourne community for farmers, and I do not think the government perhaps recognises the missed opportunity there to get that project up and running and delivering for the whole of Victoria.

One of the areas of disappointment again was the fact that we have all recognised during COVID the importance of some things being manufactured here in Australia. We do not want to see a situation where we are held to ransom and we need things, such as what we had with the situation with PPE, for example. But the other thing is we have all talked for a long time about the importance of manufacturing, but it made us all really home in on that commitment we have now of buying Australian owned, and we are seeing that in the habits of the community. But we in South-West Coast have manufacturing. We have got manufacturing in the dairy industry, we have got manufacturing in Alcoa, and Alcoa in particular do a very good job of being environmentally focused on improving their efficiencies. They are above targets with getting their renewable energy use up.

But the government have missed an opportunity. Whilst we are all transitioning as much as we can into renewables, we need to recognise that we have still got to support manufacturing that we have here, and there was nothing for Alcoa. We cannot afford to lose a manufacturing business like that—that is environmentally responsible—because our price of electricity is too high. The government does need to understand there has to be support for Alcoa and I think even embrace the fact that they are doing such a good job and doing everything they can. So a government of Victoria supporting them would be what I would have expected to have seen in the budget.

On Portland, there was some money, $5.9 million, for a hub, but there is not a lot of detail on that yet. And it was not a sporting hub; it was to manage economic diversification. But Portland basketball and other facilities in the Portland area were really looking forward to some sort of support from the government. Sporting facilities have done it very tough, as have many volunteer organisations, such as Port Fairy SES, who early in the spring had that big flood event. It really showed everybody once again how the SES volunteers go out in extreme conditions—rain, hail, wind—and yet in Port Fairy they cannot even return to the sanctuary of a decent home because their facilities are actually leaking with holes in the roof. It is freezing and it is completely unacceptable. When you have got people
doing volunteer work in such extreme conditions, you would hope that we could actually show them the respect of having somewhere decent to return home to. So I am sure there is money that is still available, and I hope the government is listening to that request from the Port Fairy SES, who are waiting for funding so they can join the fire brigade and build an efficient facility that does not waste taxpayers money, because it makes complete sense to home them together.

The Portland Coast Guard, which is another example of volunteers who go out and help our community by helping people out on boats who have got themselves into strife, actually saves our government money. We have got all these people training and giving up their time, and what they have is not even a home; it is just this shelter on the coast. We all know how cold it can be on the coast, and they are out on the coast when there are extreme conditions, because that is why people get into trouble—it is usually in extreme conditions. So these guys do not even have walls on the shelter above their head where they come together and try to train and do what they need to do to keep our community safe.

There are plenty of projects that need more money—I know that—but the Warrnambool breakwater and the boat ramp are two projects that are very important to the local economy. It is a tourism part of the world, so having those sorts of projects invested in so we can attract visitors, particularly post COVID, is something I would have liked to have seen in the budget and that we have advocated hard for. I think it is time that the government actually starts to look at the regions.

They have invested, or they have borrowed, $155 billion, and it is not something I am nervous about—I am not nervous about borrowing—what I am nervous about though is what we saw two days ago with the loss of the AAA credit rating, which was a real reflection of the assessors’ confidence, or lack thereof, in the Labor government. As I keep saying, I have been in business and I have borrowed fairly hefty sums of money to run a business and to grow, and I do not have any issue with that. But I know when you are assessed it is about your capacity to pay back, and often part of that assessment is what your history has been. When we look at the Labor government, what we do know is that historically they have not been the best managers of money, and we saw that during the Cain-Kirner era.

Ms Britnell interjected.

Ms BRITNELL: Whilst you might say, ‘Oh, well, that’s history’, I would urge you to look at the budget just before the pandemic hit and before the bushfires. Before anybody over the other side tries to say, ‘Oh, well, that was a long time ago. What about now?’, okay, we will talk about now. Just before the pandemic and just before the bushfires, this government was already in a hell of a state and the budget was looking pretty poor, and the blowouts for the projects they manage are the reason why. No wonder when they go to borrow there is nervousness around their ability to repay because there is a history of blowouts. It is like the Metro Tunnel; I think it was $5 billion that it was meant to cost, and now it is up to three times that. That is like saying, ‘I’m going to build a house for $300,000’. It is not about saying, ‘Now, I’ve changed the plan. I want four bathrooms, I want double-storey, and it’ll cost $900,000’. No, this is if you get the same house for three times the price. So we are getting a tunnel budgeted for $5 billion now blown out to three times that, and that is just one example. No wonder the government are now starting to yell out, because they know their history of managing money is poor. The community know that. We Liberals have a very strong history of managing budgets, managing money. Let us watch what goes ahead. But I would be very nervous with the Victorian community if I was—

Ms Thomas interjected.

Ms BRITNELL: I am nervous. As a Victorian community member, I am nervous, and we will watch. But I will not let these blowouts go unnoticed, and I will make sure, particularly in my part of the world, for things like the hospital, that every dollar spent delivers for the community of South-West Coast.
Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (12:11): I am delighted to have this opportunity to comment on the budget handed down by the Andrews government and I am very happy to inform you that Hawthorn has not been forgotten. I knew you would be excited to hear that news. When governments hand down budgets they reveal two important things: their values and their priorities. I am very pleased that the budget does this and speaks to my own vision which, when I was first elected in somewhat surprised circumstances, I had to think, ‘What sort of mantra do I want for myself to inhale and to embrace’. I came up with ‘A Victoria that is fair, productive and compassionate’, and I think to be realistic you have to have all three. It is no good being compassionate if there is no productivity to support the compassion. It is no good being fair—and so on. I appreciate that for both sides of the house that is going to be, hopefully, always a challenge as we progress in making life better for those around us, the people we serve.

This budget prioritises people and puts people at the centre of our economic recovery. In that spirit I am delighted that it puts a high value on education and school infrastructure, with the single biggest investment in our state’s history. In my inaugural speech in this place just under two years ago I said that:

It has been a delight for my staff and me to visit, get to know and support parents, staff and students of our government and non-government schools, which without exception, I observe, do excellent work with and for young people.

Among the schools that I visited were Auburn High, Auburn South Primary and Camberwell Primary School. All three had a lot of potential still to unleash. I am delighted that this government has backed all three of these schools that we have been in contact with.

To begin first with Auburn High, this school can be summarised as on the move and in a hurry to reach even greater heights. It is such an energetic place. They are interested not just in themselves but in the wider world, when I look at the relationships with China, for example, and in so many other programs that they have. Opened under a different government, this school was underfunded from day one and was lumped with existing maintenance and infrastructure problems, with no support from those opposite, I am sorry to tell you. Thanks to the hard work of dedicated staff, students and an engaged school community, this has changed. I am proud that this government has well and truly played its part in the exciting transition of this fine school. Building on the $5.5 million in the previous budget, the $10.13 million announced will help deliver the all-important stage 2 of the school’s master plan. It was fantastic to catch up recently with the school’s outstanding principal, Maria Karvouni, to deliver the great news and reaffirm this government’s commitment to the school’s trajectory.

Opposite and just a short drop-punt away from Auburn High is Auburn South Primary, a school that also goes from strength to strength and one that I am proud that the Andrews government is backing. Shortly after my election and again last week I met with the school’s principal, Marcus Wicher, a hardworking young man with boundless enthusiasm and passion for his school community. We agreed that the school’s focuses of encouraging students to be resilient, to bounce back, to take risks and to seek out new challenges were important characteristics to instil in young people. We agreed there were things that we as a government could help improve. Upgrading and modernising the school, in particular the main wing, was top of the list. I am extremely proud that following the $336 000 announced through the Infrastructure Planning and Acceleration Fund the government’s further increased investment of $3.3 million will deliver just that. Again, this was something consistently promised by those opposite, but when it came to delivery the Andrews government was there ready and willing to do so.

That leaves Camberwell Primary School. Of the 12 bilingual schools in Victoria, one of them proudly resides in the Hawthorn electorate. Since its inception as a bilingual school in 1991, Camberwell Primary School has provided personalised learning in a rich, engaging community environment that empowers students to be active global citizens keen to make a difference in the world. I should point out as well that the world noticed. In 2014 Camberwell Primary was awarded the LabelFrancÉducation seal recognised by the French government for excellence in French language. Like Auburn High and Auburn South Primary, Camberwell Primary is made up of energetic and
devoted staff, engaged and hardworking students and active parents that want the best for their kids and the school community they are part of. A key pillar of transforming the school into increased green and open space for students was to convert the car park or some of the car park into just that. This government’s investment of $709 000 will go a long way to helping that be achieved, and I want to commend the staff, students and parents for their advocacy over a number of years for this project, sometimes known as the Camberwell green project.

Vocational education: it would be remiss of me not to make some brief remarks about vocational education. It was an honour to accept the invitation of the Minister for Education to chair the expert reference group for the review conducted by John Firth into vocational education and comprising practitioners from all sectors. As a former long-term secondary educator I am passionate about the changes our review promoted and proud to see them implemented in this budget, with a $38 million investment to develop a new single VCE-integrated senior secondary certificate. Fundamentally this investment takes away that choice students have been forced to make between doing VCE or the Victorian certificate of applied learning, and I think this will give students the very best opportunity to develop both academic and practical vocational skills. I am often fond of saying that a good VCAL is usually better than a mediocre VCE for a particular student when you think about it. Well, we do not need to make those comparisons any longer.

This takes me then to the Big Housing Build. I want to turn to this element of the budget, and it is one that I think shows first and foremost the humanity of this government and one in which I am proud to say Hawthorn will play a leading role. The $5.3 billion Big Housing Build represents the biggest investment in public and community housing ever in this country, building more than 12 000 new homes, which will ensure more Victorians have a place to call home. I am particularly pleased that of these new homes 2000 will be allocated for Victorians living with a mental illness, once again reflecting the government’s commitment to mental health and to fixing a broken system.

I note the profound words of the member for Richmond, one of my electoral neighbours in this place and of course Minister for Housing, who said:

… we’re not just investing in bricks and mortar, but the lives of Victorians for decades to come.

And how true is that. Of the 21 local government areas that were identified as being in urgent need of more social and affordable housing, the City of Boroondara was one of them, and I am delighted that Bills Street, Hawthorn, will be home to some of the first community and social houses in this state. The redevelopment site at Bills Street will offer increased housing opportunities for more Victorians than ever before. A range of new and improved housing solutions will be delivered, and I am pleased that the master plan has been updated in response to feedback received from the community.

Speaking of the community, I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from my constituents. My office has been inundated with emails since the budget was released, and the overall tone of these communications has been one of great positivity but also of great urgency. The message has been clear: ‘Let’s get building’. Now, I find this interesting because it often happens in certain situations people say, ‘Yes, I am all for this but not in my backyard’—the old nimby. I believe that the level of education and understanding and tolerance has grown enormously, not just in Hawthorn but I think in Melbourne, in Victoria generally speaking. So there is not the same sort of idea: ‘Well, it’s all right. I am really keen on it but not next door’. And you hear silly things like ‘It’ll change the character of the neighbourhood’. That is code for—well, you know what it is code for. Or ‘We weren’t fully consulted’, which is code for ‘We didn’t want it anyway, and we would rather have loads of consultations that would keep the matter for another few years, preferably until we die’. One dear constituent told me that really, ‘There were just too many people living in Camberwell’. Now, that was unfortunately bereft of hard data of any kind, but it was certainly a feeling that in her case she felt very strongly. Occasionally she has been here in the visitors, actually—no guessing, no guessing. But I do think we have come a long way in how we see that sort of thing. We do not any longer think, ‘Well, yes, it’s a nice idea—but for somebody else, and not near us’ sort of thing. And even I heard
some sillier things like ‘Oh, well, the public transport isn’t so good in Bills Street’. Well, that one is easily fixed, isn’t it? And so on and so forth. It sounds as though that is overwhelming; it is not overwhelming. I am just fascinated by the number of local residents who wrote in and said, ‘About time; good on you for making that move’. So that has been really encouraging, I must say.

The transport infrastructure is something else. My staff told me that the video of me speaking in this place on a separate piece of legislation, where I confess to the world that I have never driven a car, has been viewed many thousands of times on social media. Once upon a time I could not have cared less about that. Now I am quite excited that thousands of people are looking at me on media—I can tell you that. Indeed I have not learned to drive since that contribution; I have not been inspired. But my love for Melbourne’s public transport system only grows fonder, which is why I am delighted that the government is investing $2.2 billion to kickstart work on the Suburban Rail Loop. Now, that is good news. This will include project development, initial land assembly, construction power works, utility relocations and protection works, geotechnical investigations and precinct aviation measures. Now, I am not offering definitions about what those things mean, but they must be good, mustn’t they? This city- and state-shaping project will transform Victoria’s public transport system and provide important travel connections to employment, health, education and rail centres in Melbourne’s suburbs.

Finally, I would like to close my remarks by saying a little bit about the government’s unprecedented investment of $1.6 billion to create renewable energy hubs across the state. One thing I learned from my election two years ago is that in the electorate of Hawthorn the times, they are a-changing. Effective action on climate and investing in renewable energy is something my constituents expect, and it is something they demand—and so they should—which is why I am pleased that this investment in renewable energy will increase crucial grid infrastructure, decarbonise our energy system, drive down emissions and support more solar homes. This three-in-one investment will create local jobs, reduce power prices and advance our work in tackling climate change, and may I say it is very warmly welcomed in my community.

I would like to just say that this is a budget with Labor values writ large, and it is a budget that gets to the heart of what the Andrews Labor government values and prioritises. I welcome the boldness and creativity of this government, and I continue to be proud of the work being done for the people of Hawthorn. I just would like to say that I was most taken aback by the very positive comments of the member for Croydon in perhaps explaining how good his advocacy had been but also as a backhanded compliment. He knows a good government when he sees one, maybe in comparison to the rather grim and negative responses of the member for South-West Coast. But that is life. Thank you.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (12:26): I am very pleased to rise to contribute to this debate on the budget. It is interesting to see the tone of the government with respect to this budget, because what we have seen is a return to, unfortunately, the traditional era of Labor governments, particularly under the Cain-Kirner years, which were marked by debt and were without a plan to repay that debt. Governments have the capacity to borrow money. It is easy to borrow money. The challenge of any government is a plan to repay those borrowings, and that is a challenge that this government needs to be able to explain to Victorians. They need to be able to explain to Victorians how they will repay this debt when we reach $150 billion.

We appreciate the fact that we have been through a pandemic. We appreciate the fact that we have also been through the significant impact of our bushfires, but a significant portion of the borrowings by this government is to fund projects which are not about kickstarting an economy post COVID; they are in fact dealing with pre-existing projects that in fact have faced cost blowouts. You only need to look at those projects across the state. We are spending more money, but we are not getting an improved or expanded outcome. We are getting the same outcome, but we are paying more for it. So it is a bit like borrowing money to build a three-bedroom home and then going back to get additional money from the bank but still only getting your three-bedroom home. That is the analogy with the projects that we have seen under this government.
Locally in my community I am pleased to see that after years of advocacy, of working with the school community at Fairhills High School—and I have raised this issue on numerous occasions in this house—I am pleased for the community, pleased for the school and pleased for the students that they have finally received their funding for this stage 1 redevelopment, something that that community has desperately needed for many years. I congratulate school council president Scott Fraser and also outgoing principal Harvey Wood, who for many years advocated long and hard for those communities. Schools such as Fairhills Primary School and Knox Central Primary School have received funding as part of the government’s recently announced maintenance program, post budget, and certainly they are good outcomes for those schools. But unfortunately many other schools in my community have missed out.

I have stood in this place and advocated for the community of Knox Gardens Primary School. That school community lost two portables. They had to get a crane into the school about five years ago to take away two portables at the school because the education department said to the school, ‘You’re oversupplied’. Well, now the school numbers have risen. They got a portable back, but they wanted another portable back, which is basically to get back to the status quo. The department was unwilling to give them that additional portable. So the school was forced to close the library and turn the library into a classroom, and the books in the library have been shoved into a cupboard, into a storage room. So the school wanted an additional portable, but unfortunately the department has been unwilling to do that and now the school community is going to get a portable and the parents have fundraised to pay for it. I just think we need to sit back and remember when we are talking about educational outcomes, when we have a situation with a school community where parents are running fundraisers, sausage sizzles, to pay for these outcomes, that governments have an obligation to support all within our community.

In my electorate there was no major support for road infrastructure, and I on many occasions have stood in this house arguing that McMahons Road needs to get traffic lights at the Burwood Highway—a critical intersection that the community desperately wants upgraded. The minister recently advised that will not occur, disappointing. But the advocacy will not stop. As I was told repeatedly by this government, money will not be provided to Fairhills High School. Only recently they said Fairhills High School would not receive money until 2022, but we did not stop, we did not give up, the community did not walk away, we stood together, we continued the fight—and pleasingly we got an outcome. And that is what a local member does on behalf of their electorate—they work with their community, they work with their stakeholders and they stand up in the Parliament of Victoria and advocate on behalf of their community to get improvements. And that is what every member in this house, regardless of their politics, is charged to do when they are elected to the Victorian Parliament.

There are still the outstanding concerns about the future of Lake Knox on the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning site on the corner of Scoresby Road and the Burwood Highway. That piece of land is slated for future housing developments and the lake situated on the site is slated to be bulldozed. It is home to an endangered blue-billed duck species, and disappointing to date the government has been unwilling through Development Victoria to engage with local stakeholders in our environment groups to identify solutions on how we can retain the lake. On issues around the depth of the lake, issues around the retaining wall and issues around water mitigation the government needs to sit down with communities and work through a solution. Instead of saying why we cannot save the lake, what they should be doing is saying what measures can be put in place to save the lake. If all stakeholders get to a point and they exhaust all options and the only solution is to demolish the lake, well, the community will accept that. But they will only accept that once you have gone through a proper consultation process. The advocacy does not stop, the campaigning does not stop. Like I was told in the past, ‘You won’t get funding upgrades for your schools’, and then I finally pushed and pushed and pushed and got an outcome, I will still continue to advocate on this issue as well.

The member for Hawthorn gave an interesting anecdote about his capacity to commute around his electorate. I can only be grateful for the member that he is not the representative in this place for the
seat of Ferntree Gully, because he would have grave difficulty travelling around that community without a car, and many residents in my community who do not have a car or who do not have a licence find it difficult to commute on public transport. We have seen little upgrade to public transport in my community: nothing for Ferntree Gully station from this government, nothing by way of upgrades for significant bus services, nothing about the Knox tram—something that the Labor Party promised my community 21 years ago. They said, ‘A Labor government will build a tramline to Knox City’. They went halfway, built it to Vermont South and then stopped, and provided a bus service as an alternative. Well, 21 years later the argument has not gone away, the need has not gone away, and if anything the population at the end of that proposed tramline has only got bigger with the development of multistorey units in the vicinity of Knox City shopping centre. These are the issues that my community want addressed: upgrades to roads, duplication, triplcation of roads in my electorate. These are the things that my community want to see outcomes on.

My communities, like all communities, have been gravely impacted by COVID. Businesses are suffering. People have lost their jobs. People are underemployed. We need to see a jobs-focused solution, one that drives employment outcomes, so that people can return to a standard of living that they have been used to, so that people can stay in their homes and not have to sell their homes, so that people can keep their businesses open, so that people can continue to be offered the hours of work they used to be offered in the past. That is not a political issue, it is a community issue—and we all want to see that outcome, regardless of where you live within the state of Victoria.

In terms of the budget and my portfolios, in emergency services there has been scant provision and support for the CFA in this budget. Funding is going to be provided for some station upgrades, and whilst that is welcome, certainly across the state stations have been arguing for and crying out for support in terms of truck replacements. We have got vehicles across the state that are more than 20 years old, and whilst some of them are still serviceable, there are many that need to be replaced. But again the government does not have a vision for that, because unfortunately the government has been more focused on a war with our volunteers than supporting our volunteers. This is something that has been a hallmark unfortunately of emergency services for at least the last six years. Volunteers are sick of the politics. They are sick of the fighting. They are sick of the campaigning. They just want to get on with their jobs and volunteer in a community and support their community, knowing that the government, knowing that the minister, knowing that the Premier and others have their back. That is all they want. They do not want a fight. They just want to be supported. They know that this will not change until there is a different approach by the government which is conciliatory, which is fair dinkum, which is done in good faith and where people know that they are being trusted by the government.

We made a commitment that we will rebuild the CFA, but you can only rebuild the CFA if it is designed from the bottom up—not from the top down; not by politicians, by union leaders or by anyone else. It has got to come from the bottom, and it has got to be something that those on the ground have faith in, in its future design. That is why I was very pleased to announce recently the establishment of our CFA advisory committee, chaired by Jack Rush, who has a significant history in this space with his role in the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. He has agreed to chair a committee that will do that work—the consultation, the engagement and the design—not focused on politics, not focused on recriminations, not focused on fighting but focused on the future of designing a CFA that is respected by volunteers regardless of their politics, regardless of their level of service, and that sustains our volunteers.

When heaven forbid we have another Mallacoota, when heaven forbid we have another Black Saturday and the call goes out, we need those thousands of volunteers to get in their vehicles and drive hundreds of kilometres to fight fires across our state and into New South Wales, because that is what volunteers do. I am concerned that in the future those volunteers will not be there, and we all should be concerned with that, because we rely on our volunteers to support our state—volunteers who give up their time, do not ask for any thanks, do not ask for any payment but just give up their time to support Victoria.
That is what I am focused on and that is what we are focused on, and unfortunately in this budget it has not provided the level of support that our CFA volunteers would be expecting as well.

Can I just also come to the Treasurer’s announcement in his capacity as Minister for Industrial Relations about his casual payment scheme. Whilst the government is going to be funding the scheme initially, we do know that the casual loading incorporates a sick leave component and we know that an employer is paying that through their pays, therefore to be levied and to be taxed means that an employer is going to be slugged twice for the same outcome.

I think the state government needs to make a very clear decision: are they in or are they out when it comes to industrial relations? The state government ceded powers 25 years ago, which was supported by the Bracks and Brumby governments. I think this government needs to make a fundamental decision: do you want to get back into IR? And if you do, take back the referral and run the system. But do not run a parallel system with the federal government, because it provides uncertainty, it is not supported by industry, it is not supported by employers and it does not provide certainty about the direction of this government. This budget is going to saddle Victorians of future generations with a significant debt, and the government has to stand up and say: ‘This is how this debt will be repaid’.

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (12:41): This is the second year I have had the honour of rising and responding, ever so proudly, to the Victorian state budget. Like last year, I want to start by thanking the Treasurer for the benefits that this year’s budget brings to my community in the electorate of Bass and to all Victorians. This is a budget for its time, as the Premier so articulately said in a video post I did on budget day:

Road, rail, hospitals, schools, TAFE, early years, taking the pressure off families, renewable energy, social housing, mental health. It is the biggest budget in size and scale that we have ever produced.

It is about looking after people and putting them first, as this year we have seen damage done to our economy. It has exposed the cracks in our systems and structures and shown also that we need to do so much more to support those in insecure work, to support women and to support our people who need a much better mental health system, our youth, our farmers, our industries, our families, our businesses and so much more, and this budget certainly does that.

As we all know, Bass is a really diverse electorate—one big community encompassing many smaller communities. We have the outer metro areas around Pakenham, Clyde and Clyde North; the agriculturally rich peat soils of Koo Wee Rup; the peaceful waterline areas of the eastern side of Western Port; and the rugged coastal stretches of the Bass Strait from Phillip Island to Inverloch. We have resident populations in our urban areas that are growing at an estimated rate of five or six families a week. Then we have our smaller communities that really swell to capacity when those school bells finish and the holiday bells start. Yet at the heart of every community are the people. I am proud that when the Andrews Labor government was elected we promised to put people first. Irrespective of where they live, people come first.

I do not want to dwell on how hard this year has been for all of my constituents. It is not a competition really that anyone wants to win. What I do want to dwell on are the many ways that my electorate will benefit from the commitments made in this budget. What do my constituents tell me they need? In this respect, I doubt that Bass is any different from anywhere else in the state. They want a job, and after the hardships of this year they want a home where they feel safe. They want a good school for their kids, unhindered pathways to TAFE, college or university, and health care, which of course includes mental health services, specialist services and facilities. They ask for safe roads and public transport. They want a sustainable environment to enjoy now and to leave to future generations.

This budget is smart and it is focused. It is about recognising and remedying the inequalities in our economy and labour force and job creation for women, young people and those over 60—those hardworking Victorians who have plenty of experience but few formal qualifications. It is about partnerships. It is not about handing out money and hoping it is well spent. As an example, in schools
over 6000 jobs across the state are likely to be created by our government’s investment in building schools. When I look locally, Pakenham Consolidated School will receive $10 million from this budget for major upgrades, a junior amenities block and a dedicated space for their students in the hands-on learning program. There were cheers all round for this announcement. When you have a principal like Katrina Stewart and her fabulous teaching and support staff, who love their school and give their absolute best to their students so they have every opportunity, every support and have a positive learning experience in every program, then as the local MP you go in and fight for them and get them what they need. You are there with them every step of the way.

Moving to Clyde North Station Primary School, they will receive $11.3 million in this budget as works kick off, with the land acquired and construction tender just awarded. It is one of 100 new schools our government has committed to building between 2019 and 2026. The new campus is on track to start welcoming its 525 students in 2022.

Wonthaggi Secondary College will receive $25.7 million for the next stage of construction at the San Remo junior campus. This is such welcome news and comes on top of an already funded $19.2 million first stage. This will open in 2022 and have a capacity of 500 students from San Remo, Phillip Island, our waterline towns and the Bass hills, enabling them to study that much closer to home.

TAFE has not been forgotten either. This budget includes $631 million for up to 80,000 free TAFE and subsidised training places and $33 million to expand opportunities for apprentices.

A member: Hear, hear.

Ms CRUGNALE: Hear, hear.

And we have a new bus connection between Pakenham and Officer Secondary College, and it is another winner in the budget. It is easier for kids to get to school, easier for parents juggling work and care and easier on the traffic congestion and environment with less cars on the road.

Speaking of roads, of course we will have an additional turning-right lane, and it was wonderful to have the Minister for Roads and Road Safety down—just last week actually—at Cardinia Road. This lane will turn in to Henry Road, which will improve safety and reduce delays. It is literally a stone’s throw from the newly opened road bridge over the Pakenham line, another Labor government achievement. So that—

A member interjected.

Ms CRUGNALE: I know, the road bridge—over the moon, over the rail. We promised to get rid of this level crossing and it is exactly what we have done, and well ahead of schedule. We do not muck around. It was such a joyous day on Sunday cutting the ribbon with the Pakenham Lakeside Primary School captains and parents and residents and watching the Cardinia Car Club be the first to drive over. There was sort of a random rollerblader scooting over the other side of the road revelling in having two whole lanes to themselves. People in the area in Pakenham have been so active bringing their ideas to the open space design, which kicks off next year, and of course really super patient, and hasn’t it been worth it.

At the top of my priority list was bringing forward the remaining three on the Pakenham line, which are ideally referred to as the ‘Paky three’. With the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, just last week again, we announced the fast-tracking of the Paky three—McGregor Road, Main Street and Racecourse Road—a new station and bus interchange at Pakenham and extending the line to Pakenham East, because there will be 7000 houses in Pakenham East and there will be 28,000 people living in that area. That was scheduled for completion in 2025 and we are bringing it forward to 2023–24. If Cardinia Road is any sort of indicator, I am sure we will get it done sooner rather than later. Works have started, and I really cannot wait to dive into this next level crossing project with our local community. We will see an actually massive transformation of Pakenham, and a once divided-by-the-rail-tracks community as well will have a united township there.
This is part of the $15 billion investment on this line, the busiest alongside the Cranbourne line in the entire metro network. For my communities in Clyde and Clyde North who use the Cranbourne train network, that is moving along at a really cracking pace as well, and we are obviously planning a rail extension to Clyde as well. And you know, when you bring in the Metro Tunnel, the airport link, it is kind of a one-train ride—no change, straight to the airport—which is great news also for those on the Pakenham and the Gippsland lines, who can come through, change at Pakenham and then go straight to the airport.

On the housing front—I think I am going to need about another 10 minutes—the $5.3 billion big social housing build program is life-changing. It is a big investment and it benefits us all. It brought me to tears, because it is the right thing to do. We have invested over the years in this space, and this announcement is our biggest ever in our state’s history and our nation’s history. Stories and experiences I have heard these last two years and well prior actually in my work in mental health are real. They are meaningful, they are distressing and they are really insightful. We can do more, and this is a very, very big start. As I said in my inaugural speech in this space, we need much better social housing because without the safety and security of housing everything is so much harder. This is another priority for Bass that is happening because in Bass the number of people reaching out to homelessness services, financial services and support services is just too high. The number of women and children experiencing family violence is too high. The number of young people cough surfing, the growing number of single women at risk of homelessness, older women, people dealing with mental health challenges and people living with disability that really need suitable accommodation—this investment is for them.

On a local, local front in Bass, Cardinia and Casey are in the top 21 priority local government areas. Bass Coast shire will receive a minimum of $25 million for housing to provide affordable homes and housing to our community there. On the community hospital front, Pakenham constituents were really thrilled to learn that we have actually got money in this budget to purchase land for our Pakenham Community Hospital. With Cranbourne again, and with my Clyde and Clyde North community who will be using the Cranbourne Community Hospital, it was part of that package as well, which is amazing. I cannot wait to work with my community consultative committee and the people in Pakenham and surrounding areas as well, because we all want to be well, we want to stay well and we want to have that care close to home. For Phillip Island we will have another community hospital. We are into the planning and design stage, having already done the services plan, so we are well and truly on track to deliver a community hospital not just for residents but also for our much-loved visitors.

With mental health, again, our government respects the ability and the power of the royal commission. Part of the $870 million allocated to mental health will be spent on the interim report findings. We had two workshops in 2019 and we updated them this year, which I have submitted on behalf of the Bass electorate to the royal commission. Mental health services, programs and facilities are another priority for the Bass community, and this budget delivers greater access to community and hospital-based treatment and support.

On the jobs front, there are 400 000 new jobs. It is an ambitious but very realistic target we want to reach by 2025, half of them by 2022—jobs in the city, jobs in the regions.

Fast-tracking to emergency services, I guess I will mention my Clyde station. We have got money in the budget to build them a new station. For the ambulance station in Clyde North the land has just been acquired, and a police station is coming as well.

On the regional front, there is so much. There is $300 million to get rid of mobile black spots and $250 million to co-fund businesses to have better broadband connectivity through the regions. Our farmers, our growers and our producers are essential, and we are putting $115 million to further support the industry, them and regional Victoria. Our flagship Regional Infrastructure Fund will get a significant boost. There is so much happening in the tourism recovery space as well, with the vouchers but also with the $23 million for Wamoon, Wilsons Prom, as well, which I spoke to in the last sitting week.
Tax, small businesses—there is heaps happening in tax relief for businesses and families. There are new jobs tax credits, stamp duty, business support toolkits and business support funds. Seriously, I am going to run out of time. I would just like to end by saying that this is a budget that benefits Bass. It benefits our community. I walk beside my community, I am working for my community, and we work really well together when the community speaks up and we want to bring about positive change. Thank you to the Treasurer and everyone involved.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (12:56): I note the member for Bass says she walks beside her community. It is just a shame that the member for Narre Warren North and the member for Narre Warren South walk past their communities, when they used to say that it was the greatest place to live, work and raise a family. Remember it was one of the most common sayings in here? But it is sad that we have got the Labor MPs who refuse to live in the area of Casey and Cardinia. They will not live in Pakenham. They will not live in Berwick. They will not live in Narre Warren. What do they hate about the area so much—the area they are supposed to represent—that they would actually want to live in the inner city rather than in the electorates where it is so important to be? We live in a magnificent area.

I will start with the positives from the budget for the electorate, because it is a very short list. But I will say for the Emerald Secondary College I know that the families, the parents and the school community are very pleased to see that they are going to get a STEM centre, which is so important for the students up in the Dandenong Ranges. What they do say, though, is it is so disappointing that it has taken so long, that we had to run such a strong campaign of showing photos of an open septic tank underneath the school building before this government would act—an open septic tank, leaking facilities continuously from within the building.

They have got a teacher up there who is in a wheelchair but still teaches at the school. They are in a classroom where the teaching box was up a step, and the government would not listen. You talk about equality, you talk about getting people into positions where they can work with the schools—where they can work wherever they please—and you had a facility where they could not even get up to where they could teach because of the step. That is simply not good enough.

I note the member Hawthorn said this is a very creative budget. Let me tell you, if you give me a $150 billion credit card, I reckon I could be fairly creative as well. It is $150 billion that they are going to be borrowing from the next generation; $150 billion with a zero plan to pay it off. These are the concerns my community are continuously raising right now. They are worried about the deficit going forward. They are worried about a budget that is going to be so blown out of proportion that their kids and their grandkids will have to pay it off and not be able to invest in the future at the time that they need to. It is a shame that that is going to happen.

I am going to quickly talk about Berwick College. There is a program finishing there which has been budgeted for in the past, something we fought very hard for down in our community and which should be opening hopefully at the end of this term. That was the health and wellbeing centre for Berwick College—such an important facility for our local community.

Many around here would know—and this is something that I do not believe there should be any politics in at all—youth suicide was a major issue through the Casey-Cardinia area. It was something that the community banded together on; they tried to find ways that they could work together to fix the problem and to get involved with young people. One of those ways was to work with Kerri Bolch to make sure this facility was going to be ready. I am going to say without any politics in it—it is so gratifying and so pleasing to see this facility will open shortly. The campaign started in 2013, and now it is at the stage where they are going to have a facility that will work with children and work with families to prevent the mental health issues that we had through the Casey and Cardinia region, and I think it is so important that we do get that down there.

Car parks—we need more car parks at train stations. It is disappointing that we have seen from this government a failure to deliver car parks throughout the region of Casey and Cardinia at the train
stations. We have got money there on the table from the federal government, and all we have got are delays from state government in actually getting these done. Whilst Beaconsfield will be opening shortly, we have got a station at Berwick and the government is refusing to listen or to use the money from the federal government for the car parks at that location.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 8 December.

Members

MINISTER FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT

MINISTER FOR CRIME PREVENTION

MINISTER FOR PLANNING

MINISTER FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

Absence

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (13:01): I rise to inform the house that today I will answer questions for the portfolios of public transport, roads and road safety; crime prevention, corrections, youth justice, victim support; planning, housing; and multicultural affairs, community sport and youth.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

OMBUDSMAN

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (13:01): My question is to the Premier. The Victorian Ombudsman has stated:

Once again, my ongoing funding has fallen substantially short of what is needed to respond to public expectations of my office.

… the apparent reluctance to fund my office could risk looking like an attempt to undermine it.

Given the Ombudsman exposed the Labor government’s red shirts rort, why shouldn’t Victorians believe that your failure to adequately fund her office is an attempt to undermine it?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (13:02): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The reason that Victorians need have no fear as to the accuracy of those claims or any perceptions thereof is because they have no basis in fact. And as the Leader of the Government—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr ANDREWS: They have absolutely no basis in fact. As the Leader of the Government, I think I am uniquely placed to make that point—not the first time I have made it, and if I am called upon to make it again, I shall. No basis in fact whatsoever.

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (13:02): Attacking the Ombudsman—unbelievable. The head of Victoria’s Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, Robert Redlich, has today said:

… increased service levels cannot be delivered … with IBAC’s recent allocation of funding.

Budget papers show that IBAC has been allocated $4.4 million less this year than it received last year. With IBAC currently investigating Labor Party branch stacking as well as the relationship between the Labor government and the United Firefighters Union, why won’t the Premier give the anti-corruption watchdog the funding it needs to clean up corruption in this government and in this state?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will allow the question but just remind members that the supplementary question needs to relate directly to the previous question. I am not ruling the question out.
Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (13:03): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. The Leader of the Opposition I think tries to go back over ground that has been thoroughly and comprehensively rebutted as to—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr ANDREWS: If the father of the house wants to get a question in, well, get up and ask one. Otherwise, if your only contribution is these sorts of half-smart interjections, then that is not really advancing the seriousness of this issue. Your own people are denying you an answer, because I will not speak over—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Before coming to the point of order that the Leader of the Opposition is about to raise, I just want to remind members on both sides of the house not to shout across the chamber so that we can hear the answers that are being given and the questions that are being asked.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, the Premier is clearly debating the question, and I ask you to draw him back to answering it.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was responding to interjections. I ask the Premier not to respond to interjections and members to allow the Premier to answer the question.

Mr ANDREWS: That is of course disorderly, but it is very difficult to get a word out when others are interjecting. Can I make the point that the Leader of the Opposition seeks to advance a theory that is simply not accurate. He seeks to attribute to the head of IBAC commentary that I do not believe he has made today. There will be a budget next—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: No. There will be a budget next year—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr ANDREWS: Well, your interpretation of the head of IBAC’s commentary is wrong, actively wrong, and you do not like it when it is pointed out that you are all at sea, my friend—all at sea.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: ECONOMY

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (13:05): It is with great pride that I share with the house that business and growth in Victoria are making an inspiring resurgence—just like we knew that it would—and our strategies are bearing fruit. There are plenty of loud voices, including some of those opposite, that were willing to write off Victoria. But Victoria’s resilience and our strong economic fundamentals have seen us attract new investment, putting us well and truly on the road to recovery. Off the back of the Andrews Labor government’s jobs-boosting budget, the Victorian business confidence index increased by 11 points to 22 points—ahead of all other states.

The air of optimism across our great state is palpable, with the best and the brightest companies from around the world taking notice. They know that we have got a good thing going on here in Victoria, and they want to be part of it. Within a period of five days this past week I have had the great opportunity to announce that two major international companies have chosen Victoria as their base to expand their businesses and to create local jobs. On Friday I announced that San Diego-based Illumina, a world-leading biotech company, has committed to a $60 million Illumina-University of Melbourne genomics hub in Parkville, creating around 150 highly skilled full-time jobs. And just yesterday I had the great opportunity to announce that Amazon Web Services, the Seattle-based world leader in cloud
technology, has chosen Victoria as its home to develop an Asia-Pacific cloud infrastructure region, creating at least 90 jobs, further boosting Victoria’s already thriving tech sector. So as we made clear in our jobs plan, we are investing in Victoria to ensure that our great state remains the jobs and tech hub of our nation.

WEST GATE TUNNEL

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (13:07): My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. On what date will the West Gate Tunnel open?

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:07): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and the Leader of the Opposition I think has already heard me indicate publicly that the government have a contract with Transurban and its builders, CPB and John Holland, to build the West Gate Tunnel Project. That contract has within it a completion date, which we will be holding Transurban and its builders to. What is also important to note is that in asking this question it is cloaked in the hypocrisy of those opposite, who continue to oppose the delivery of this vital project supporting 3000 jobs right now.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question and she has not answered it. What date will the tunnel open?

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister was relevant to the question and then strayed to attacking the opposition. She has concluded her answer.

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (13:08): Embarrassingly for the government the EPA yesterday admitted that it had improperly approved Maddingley Brown Coal’s application to receive toxic soil from the West Gate Tunnel Project. Given the minister now has to go back to the drawing board to secure an approved site for this toxic soil, how much longer will this latest stuff-up delay the already delayed West Gate Tunnel Project?

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:09): There is a lot that is wrong in the Leader of the Opposition’s questions and assertions as the independent regulator, the EPA, is reviewing the soil locations for soil from the West Gate Tunnel Project under very strict conditions. Those arrangements have not changed, and the EPA will be dealing with the matters with its approvals process as the independent regulator should. However, can I make the point that there was no shovel of dirt turned during the four years that the Leader of the Opposition was a member of the cabinet because not one project was delivered.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is not only now attacking the opposition but debating the question and again not answering it. How long will this further delay the already delayed West Gate Tunnel Project? That was the question. I ask you to bring the minister back to approaching—getting in the postcode of—an answer.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister was being relevant to the question. She started to stray. The minister to come back to answering the question.

Ms ALLAN: Speaker, I did straight up off the bat address the issue of the EPA and how it will be undertaking its actions as appropriate for the independent regulator. Can I also say what the government will be doing is we will be pushing on and delivering the West Gate Tunnel Project—in the face of opposition day after day to the jobs, the opportunities that come from delivering this project, getting trucks off local roads, better connections for people from the inner west into the city. That is the project you oppose.
MINISTERS STATEMENTS: BUDGET 2020–21

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (13:11): I am absolutely delighted to rise to update the house on our government’s unprecedented investment in clean energy innovation. We know that Victoria has some of the best renewable resources in Australia. In fact Victoria is home to the best offshore wind resource in the country and amongst the best in the world. We also know that Victoria is home to many cutting-edge, innovative businesses that are driving new energy technologies and creating thousands of jobs. That is why I was so pleased to have joined the member for Oakleigh at Monash University just over a week ago to announce $108 million for the energy innovation initiative and accelerating Victoria’s hydrogen industry.

These initiatives are part of our $1.6 billion energy investment delivered out of last week’s state budget, the largest investment in the energy system of any state ever. It will back Victoria’s new energy businesses, getting innovative and first-of-their-kind ideas from the lab and into the grid. It will help unlock offshore wind by charting a new pathway for the industry and offering grants for development works. It will also provide vital support to innovative technologies like hydrogen from renewables, funding demonstrations, deployment and new business models. The investment will target projects that have the potential to lead to transformational impacts for Victoria in terms of jobs, investment, lower power prices and clean energy. That is absolutely what our ambition is: to drive the further uptake of those technologies. These technologies will create thousands of jobs across Victoria, adding to our Victorian renewable energy target, which is creating more than 24,000 jobs and more than $5.8 billion in economic activity by 2030, benefiting every part of our state—a fact that those opposite are happy to block or whinge about every step of the way. Our government agenda is very clear, and we will deliver.

WEST GATE TUNNEL

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:13): My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, your environment regulator, the EPA, has been forced to revoke its approval to dump toxic waste from the West Gate Tunnel Project at the Maddingley Brown Coal site in Bacchus Marsh. This unlawful approval was based on Maddingley’s environmental management plan, as required by your rushed tunnel spoil regulations. While this plan is publicly available, all details of environmental controls have been redacted. Minister, how can residents of Bacchus Marsh have any confidence when the proposed controls have been hidden from them?

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (13:13): I thank the member for her question, and I do want to say from the outset that I reject the assertions—and there are multiple assertions—in that very question. I reject each and every one of them. For a start, any approvals that are given by the EPA in terms of the so-called redactions are in fact commercial in confidence, which is a common practice until other commercial decisions are made with respect to the awarding of any contract into the future in terms of where the spoil will ultimately end up. So the EPA has made that absolutely clear, abundantly clear, and has also been very clear about the fact that further information—which at the moment needs to be commercial in confidence so it does not undermine future consideration; we do not want to do that because that would present many risks in other respects—will become available from the EPA. They have been very clear on that front.

There are also other assertions about the question that go to the very fact that out of an abundance of caution the EPA sought their own independent legal advice, and upon very strong legal advice that was given to them have made a decision to withdraw their approvals. If the proponent wishes to make a subsequent application, that will be considered on its merits with all fair processes and due diligence applied to it. The EPA stands ready to provide that due consideration upon the request, if one is to come, of a subsequent application.
Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58 says that answers must be direct, factual and succinct. I gave her a little bit of time there, but it is not about commercial; there is nothing about commercial. The environmental protections are redacted. It is all here. It is black. It has got nothing to do with cost; it is about protections.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member will resume her seat. There is no point of order. The minister has concluded her answer. I remind the member in asking her supplementary to direct the question through the Chair rather than directly to the minister.

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:16): I would like to ask the minister: why did it take legal action from Bacchus Marsh residents to expose the EPA’s unlawful approval to dump toxic waste near homes and schools in this community?

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (13:16): I thank the member for the supplementary question. Again I will say to this that there are assertions here which I absolutely reject. The EPA, as an independent regulator, sought their own legal advice and upon receiving that legal advice made a decision upon their own initiative to take the steps and the decision that they made and announced yesterday. That is all there is to it. The fact is the EPA stands ready to receive any subsequent application and will consider it on its merits.

Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on that same standing order 58 about being direct and factual, really the legal advice to the EPA was because this government has been caught out. They have been caught out and I would ask you to direct the minister to answer the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The minister has concluded her answer.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: BUDGET 2020–21

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong—Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) (13:17): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to Aboriginal self-determination supported by record investment in this year’s budget. This is not just about giving traditional owners the support they need; it is also about giving them the say that they deserve. We know this approach delivers better outcomes. In this budget we have made the biggest investment in Aboriginal communities ever—a record $356.5 million to progress treaty and advance Aboriginal self-determination right across our government, because we know the principles of self-determination need to be embedded in every portfolio and in every department.

This year’s investment is more than three times the funding in last year’s budget. It is focused on meeting community aspirations and putting power back into the hands of traditional owners, where it needs to be. We are backing the First Peoples’ Assembly, the state’s first and only democratically elected body for Aboriginal people, providing them with $19.2 million to continue their treaty work and ensure even more community voices are heard. In response, Marcus Stewart, the co-chair of the assembly said:

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of this … commitment. It consolidates the First Peoples’ Assembly … as an equal to Government.

We are also investing $40 million to expand the Aboriginal community health and family violence workforces, $85 million to reform services for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, $21 million to embed Aboriginal expertise and water management, $16 million to establish a traditional owner carbon development fund, over $25 million for Aboriginal young people and students and of course 10 per cent of our record $5.3 billion investment in social housing will be reserved to meet the needs of Aboriginal Victorians. All of this will be done in partnership. Aunty Jill Gallagher said of this budget:

… for the first time in history, Aboriginal leaders, organisations, people, families, carers, and communities were given the opportunity to have their voices and experiences included …

This is self-determination in action. This is how we will achieve better outcomes and a future that we can all be proud of.
AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (13:19): My question is for the Premier. It is becoming clear that in order to harvest our fruit and vegetable crops in the Goulburn Valley producers will need access to Pacific Islander workers under the federal government’s Pacific Islander seasonal workers program. My question for the Premier is: what is your government doing to facilitate the necessary quarantining for these workers so that they will be able to travel to the Goulburn Valley to pick our fruit?

The shortage of seasonal workers across Victoria is extremely worrying for so many of the growers in my area, many of whom have bumper crops and have been facing years of drought, fluctuating overseas markets and high water prices. Much has been said and done to incentivise local workers to become fruit pickers, but as February and March draw near, the peak picking period for pears and apples in my region is nearing and it is getting critical. To this end, the Pacific Islander seasonal workers program is really extremely important, particularly in the absence of our usual backpacker cohort.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (13:20): I thank the member for Shepparton for her question and for her advocacy on this and all issues that are important to the Goulburn Valley. She is well known and well understood to be a passionate advocate on behalf of her community. The program that the member for Shepparton refers to is of course the federal government granting permission for the entry of certain people from very low or no virus communities in the Pacific. That is largely where the program ends. Being able to provide safe quarantine would fall it would seem to the states, despite the fact that quarantining is in effect a principal responsibility of the federal government. But again, that is not the quarrel that any of us need to be getting into. It is about the practicalities of this. It is about the practicalities of very large numbers of people coming to regional Victoria to complete a very important task, both for the income of growers but also for consumers having an availability of fresh, high-quality produce at an efficient price.

What I can say to the member for Shepparton is that we are working as hard as we possibly can to deal with these issues. They are not simple. They are not easy in any way. Giving effect to the decisions that the commonwealth government in a very broad context has facilitated, if you like, rather than made, is not a simple thing. And yes, there are costs involved if we do not get this right, and one of those costs is potentially many, many coronavirus infections, particularly in communities where there have been, not just for 40 days, no infections, but in some communities months and months without any infections. The balance point is the key point here. I appreciate the advocacy on behalf of the growers and all of that supply chain that is critically important in the Goulburn Valley. I would say that we, all of us, have got to redouble our efforts to get more and more Victorians to do this work right now and into February, March, April and right out to May. That is our priority at this stage.

We will have more to say about quarantining arrangements potentially and some overseas arrivals, but that is incredibly complicated. It is not a matter of expense and it is not a matter of cost; it is a matter of what can be done at scale to the highest standard. As my honourable friend the minister for COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria would I am sure have said if she had been asked this question, there are limitations. We do not have an unlimited supply of workers and others, hotels even, to provide that highest standard, best-in-class standard, hotel quarantine. That is what the Victorian community expects. That is what the government will fundamentally deliver and, despite the laughter of those opposite who could not prove any more clearly their irrelevance to every matter of importance in this state, we will not, unlike them, compromise the safety of this community.

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker—it seems one of us is missing the other one a little bit too much. But it is okay; I am back. I never really went away.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Andrews interjected.
Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, under Rulings from The Chair—he is still going. I am actually tired of the bullying that we are getting from the Premier. Under Rulings from the Chair I ask you to—

Members interjecting.

Mr R Smith: ‘Sit down, you sook’—is that what you just said? ‘Sit down, you sook’? Is that okay? Is that what we have to put up with here in this chamber? Well, you might have a higher office than me, but you have got no more right to be in this place than I have.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is not permitted during this period of parliamentary procedure to attack the opposition. I ask you to bring him back to answering the question, and he can refrain from the bullying barbs that he likes to throw across the table.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask members not to interject across the chamber, and I ask the Premier to come back to answering the question.

Mr ANDREWS: As I was saying, these are not simple matters—simple as some may suggest from the opposition—they are complex. We are working through them and will report progress at the appropriate time.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (13:24): Look, I thank you for that response, although time is critical on these, and just this week we had the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Quarantine Fees) Bill 2020 before the house. I think that the issue of quarantine of workers under this scheme is being talked to me about at some length and the cost of what that quarantine might be, so I am just wondering, Premier: what steps and what sort of framework might you anticipate will be in place in relation to the cost of quarantine for workers as opposed to residents currently returning under the current scheme?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (13:25): I thank the member for Shepparton for her supplementary question. I think this is at the heart of the issue. This is an industry where workers are not highly paid. This is an industry where it simply cannot be avoided pointing out the fact that we have seen many, many examples of not the highest standards of practice when it comes to health and safety, industrial relations, the protection of workers and the proper pay for a proper day’s work. That is not necessarily synonymous with some elements of this industry. The notion then that we put a further disincentive—hard work, not well paid often, with not always the highest of standards—does present us with a challenge. If we say to people that they are going to have to pay $3000 to $5000 for the privilege of coming here to work such a job, I fully agree with the member for Shepparton that that will be a real challenge and a real blocker. That is why we have got to work hard, all of us, to get a solution to this. Can I offer to the member for Shepparton: I will facilitate a meeting with the Leader of the Government in the other place, the agriculture minister, to talk through in detail all of our work and what we hope to achieve in partnership with the member for Shepparton.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EVENTS

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (13:26): I am delighted to rise and update the house on a stunning summer checklist of creative and arts opportunities for all Victorians. Victorians are to be congratulated for reaching 40 days today of zero new cases. Every single Victorian has contributed to this achievement. The community’s hard work means that a feast of summer entertainment supported by the Victorian government and delivered right across the state is on offer to all.

Here is the summer checklist: the NGV Triennial begins on 19 December and it features the works of over 100 artists from 32 countries until April 2021, and it is free. February 11 will see the reopening of the renewed Australian Centre for the Moving Image and its centrepiece exhibition, The Story of the Moving Image. Summer Activations will bring the outdoors alive in a COVID-safe way at the...
State Library of Victoria, the Melbourne Recital Centre and Federation Square; and the Melbourne Museum has its Summer Plaza series. The Castlemaine State Festival, Australia’s longest running flagship regional arts festival, runs from 19 to 28 March 2021. Eric Bana’s new movie The Dry hits the big screens. It showcases more than 15 regional Victorian towns, including Minyip and Beulah, and it is based on Jane Harper’s debut novel, which won a Victorian Premier’s literary award in 2015. This summer’s Live at the Bowl will give Victorians dance music, classical concerts, ballet and big-name comedians to enjoy. The grassy amphitheatre will be divided into physically distanced platforms where small groups can gather to jive. There is the Piinpi: Contemporary Indigenous Fashion exhibition at Bendigo Gallery, and the Geelong Arts Centre will bring Victorians a month-long summer events season under a big top. Tick, tick and tick.

For those needing some R and R there is a great summer of reading from the Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards short list, including literature from Archie Roach, Vivian Pham, Richard Flanagan, Kylie Maslen and Louise Milligan. Whether it is an amazing live performance, a wander through a gallery, a film in an air-conditioned cinema or curling up with a book, Victorians have so much to choose from this summer, where everything feels new again.

**ELECTIVE SURGERY WAITING LISTS**

Mr R Smith (Warrandyte) (13:28): My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I have previously spoken to you about Marcus van der Mei, who was diagnosed with a brain tumour in September last year. After being classified as an urgent category 2, Marcus’s surgery was scheduled for this year. Two weeks ago his family was notified that the surgery has been postponed until next year. Minister, Marcus is suffering from continued uncontrolled seizures. He is just 15 years old. Is Marcus going to have to wait a further three months to get the surgery he so desperately needs?

Mr Foley (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (13:29): Can I thank the member for his question. The member, like many members, raises a really important issue. Indeed the member approached me privately about this particular very serious case, as indeed many members do, and in that regard I am very reluctant to use this forum as a platform to discuss a particular family’s tragic case, and I will not. But what I will do is give the member, as I indicated that I would do—

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister need show no reluctance. The family is very happy for it to be public. I have asked their permission to raise it in this chamber, and the minister should feel no reluctance in invading their privacy in this matter.

The Speaker: There is no point of order.

Mr Foley: I do point out to this particular member and, through the forms of the house, to all members who regularly raise this with me—and indeed a member from the opposition, immediately before question time, approached me on a not dissimilar issue—I will not be using this as a platform to use people’s trauma and family suffering as a pointscorening exercise. I just will not be doing that. But on the general principle that the honourable member raises, I have undertaken to pursue that particular case and I have personally sought some undertakings in regard to that, but it does point to the wider issue of how, during the course of the global pandemic response, we—

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has said he has taken personal undertakings. His staff have informed me and my office that in fact they are not doing anything because they cannot make critical decisions in the office.

The Speaker: Order! That is not a point of order.

Mr Foley: I just restate my position that I will not be entering into the public consideration in this forum of individual families’ trauma. This is just highly inappropriate, but I give the honourable member, as I give all honourable members, a good-faith undertaking that when they raise personal
tragic circumstances of their constituents with me, we will use our best endeavours to address them. I give that undertaking to this honourable member and to all honourable members.

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is speaking at odds with what his office has told us. His office has told us that there are no further undertakings that the minister will be taking in this matter.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The minister has concluded his answer.

Mr R SMITH (Warrandyte) (13:32): This is incredibly disappointing from the minister, who is telling the chamber one thing when his office is saying something else. But my supplementary to the Minister for Health is that tens of thousands of Victorians are waiting to see a specialist before they are even put on the surgical waitlist. Exactly how many Victorians are currently waiting to see a specialist so they can join the thousands of Victorians like Marcus who are languishing on your surgical waiting list?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (13:32): Thank you. I express again my personal disappointment in the honourable member for trying to personalise the tragic circumstances of one of his constituents.

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, every member of this house has a right to be able to raise matters that have been brought to them by their constituents and certainly, with their permission, to have those matters put to this house. The minister is seeking to censor the ability of members of this Parliament to raise individual cases of their constituents. That is contrary to the forms of the house. It is contrary to the practice of question time. I remember sitting on the other side of this table when the current Premier was raising issues around ambulances and individuals who were affected there, and there was no reluctance to talk about individual cases.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has not raised a point of order. I have not ruled that the minister cannot answer this question. The minister is to come to answering the question.

Mr FOLEY: This government has recognised that the enormous contribution that the Victorian people made during the course of the global pandemic second wave involved the deferral of important surgery arrangements. In that regard that is why the government has invested over $300 million in the forward projections, starting now, to work on a blitz to make sure that those important issues of deferred care are dealt with as expeditiously as possible. I give the honourable member an undertaking and indeed all honourable members an undertaking that that is a priority that this government is serious about, and we will reduce those waiting lists as fast as possible. In regard to the specifics—

Mr R Smith: On a further point of order, Speaker, in directing the minister, as you did in your last ruling, to return to the question, I ask you to do so again in the final few seconds that he has to be on his feet. The minister has set the context. He has made more than a passing reference to the context. The question was: how many Victorians are languishing on the surgical waiting list? I ask you to bring him back to answering that question, as you already have. And on a further point of order, I note that on repeated occasions—

The SPEAKER: Order! I will rule on the first point of order. I do not uphold the point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mr R Smith: On a further point of order, Speaker, I also note that on every occasion you have asked the minister to take his seat when a point of order has been raised against him he has spoken over you on numerous occasions, and I again ask you to request the minister to show you the respect that the Chair deserves.

Mr M O'Brien: On this point of order, Speaker, I raised the very same point of order with you at the end of the last sitting week, I believe it was, because this is a continual pattern of conduct we see
from ministers who continue to give their answers without resuming their seat when a point of order is taken by an opposition member.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Most people answering questions have been resuming their seat when points of order have been raised. The Minister for Health has on a number of occasions missed the points of order. I do ask the Minister for Health to address his remarks through the Chair and to be able to see when I am asking the minister to resume his seat. The minister to come back to answering the question.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, Speaker, and I certainly give you that undertaking. This government is committed to reducing those surgical waiting lists.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: COVID-19

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North—Minister for Child Protection, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (13:36): I rise to update the house on the government’s extensive support for supported residential services during the COVID-19 pandemic. As members would be aware, SRSs are privately operated facilities that are regulated by the human services regulator in the Department of Health and Human Services.

We know that accommodation settings like our SRSs were particularly vulnerable during the pandemic. As an initial response, outreach visits were undertaken to provide infection control advice as well as PPE. In early July we stood up Operation Benessere to provide prevention and outbreak management in sensitive accommodation settings across the state. The operation undertook targeted prevention and preparedness assessments at every SRS across Victoria. Those that were deemed high risk were prioritised, and we worked directly with the proprietors to resolve issues. Where an outbreak did occur, our comprehensive outbreak response was put in place. This included testing, site management, infection control measures and surge workforce support.

The important work will continue through the new human services COVID-19 readiness and response set-up, but we know there is further work to be done in improving the way in which SRSs are regulated outside of the pandemic and to improve the care by providers. Last year the government started a significant body of work to modernise and strengthen the way some social services, including SRSs, are regulated. We have been consulting with the sector and service users in the development of new human service standards, which will ensure we regulate more effectively. These standards will focus on ensuring safe service delivery. They will provide greater clarity to providers about what is required for compliance.

The government has also recently made a decision to modernise the human services regulator, which will ensure the new standards are applied appropriately and that the red tape burden is reduced. I look forward to working with the sector on this. We will have more to say on these reforms early next year, especially as we establish the new Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, which will have a dedicated focus on supporting our most vulnerable and diverse communities.

Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I just wish to raise with you again something I raised with you last sitting week. Constituency question 4545 to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events about recovery of tourism in the Yarra Valley was asked 57 days ago on 13 October, and I still have not got a response. And also adjournment matter 4658 to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety seeking her commitment to fix dangerous roads in the Evelyn electorate was asked 43 days ago on 27 October. I would appreciate you following up the responses.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for raising that matter. We will follow those matters up with the relevant ministers.
Constituency questions

LOWAN ELECTORATE

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (13:39): (5310) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the dangerous intersection of Horsham-Lubeck Road and Murtoa-Glenorchy Road be made safe? Recently there was yet another serious accident at this intersection. This follows a terrible fatality at the same intersection in August 2016. Despite minor amendments to the intersection in recent years, locals remain rightly concerned that the key issue of drivers simply having no line of sight to oncoming traffic has not been addressed. It is local CFA volunteers and police who have to attend these crashes, who have to deal with the anxiety of it being yet another fatality, and it is locals who fear their families and friends are most at risk. So please, Minister, when will this dangerous intersection be made safe?

YAN YEAN ELECTORATE

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (13:40): (5311) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and I ask: what funding is available in the recent state budget to assist small country schools in my electorate and in nearby parts of Nillumbik shire that many of my constituents’ children attend? I know the minister understands how special these small schools are, as he has many similar schools in his electorate in the Shire of Yarra Ranges. Schools such as Doreen, Wattle Glen, Panton Hill, Arthurs Creek, Strathewen, St Andrews, Kangaroo Ground and that special gem Christmas Hills are all integral to each of their communities and each offers a unique educational experience. State schools are great schools, but especially our small rural schools.

EVELYN ELECTORATE

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:41): (5312) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing about the From Homelessness to a Home program on behalf of residents in Lilydale who have raised concerns with me about the significant level of criminal and antisocial behaviour occurring in the vicinity of the Lilydale Motor Inn and the Yarra Valley Motel, where the government has housed ex-prisoners and where the need for police patrols multiple times a day is draining resources and causing concern to locals. What are you doing to stop the increasing prevalence of criminal and antisocial behaviour arising from this government program? How are you ensuring safety for people staying at these hotels and also local families living in the local streets surrounding, and what is the plan regarding the ongoing use of these Lilydale motels given this major problem? Lilydale residents have been harassed for seven months and are worried about their safety, having to witness alcohol and drug abuse, attempted theft, standovers, prostitution, antisocial behaviour, damage to property and trespassing. Residents have felt unsafe, and we would like a solution.

TARNEIT ELECTORATE

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (13:42): (5313) My question is for the Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing. The announcement of our government’s Big Housing Build will be life-changing for so many Victorians. By building over 9000 additional social housing units we are making it easier for Victorians to get a roof over their heads and find a place to call home. In the last two years I have met with and heard from several people living in my community who have applied for social housing, which is why I was pleased to see that Wyndham will be a priority area for the housing build. So I ask the minister this: what does this priority build mean for my community in Tarneit?

FOREST HILL ELECTORATE

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (13:42): (5314) My consistency question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, my question is once again: when will the government provide funding to address the many infrastructure needs of schools within my electorate of Forest Hill? In the most recent budget three schools in the Forest Hill district did receive some funding, which was very pleasing. However, I have raised the infrastructure needs of numerous schools in the Forest Hill district in this place countless
times during the last six years, and sadly they have largely been ignored—for example, infrastructure needs at Vermont, Orchard Grove, Livingstone, Highvale and Camelot Rise primary schools, just to mention a few. With billions of dollars being spent on education infrastructure needs throughout the state, the government would not miss a few million dollars to fix some of the truly desperate school infrastructure projects in the Forest Hill electorate. How can the minister possibly say that Victoria is the Education State when at one of my schools the female staff members have to spend most of their break times lining up to use the one female toilet? How can Victoria be the Education State when at one of my schools sewage from the school’s toilets has been in the walkway of the prep students walk?

NORTHCOTE ELECTORATE

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (13:43): (5315) My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and it relates to the recent announcement in the budget of $52 million for the Safer, Better Public Parks initiative. What improvements can locals in my community expect given that the much-loved Yarra Bend Park is named as one of the locations to benefit from this funding? I was thrilled to learn that the Corben Oval pavilion will receive $1.6 million to fund improvements that will address the ongoing issue with the power supply as well as deliver refurbishments to the old heritage-listed pavilion. I was also pleased to be able to inform some of the local cricket, AFL and soccer teams that use the facilities of the funding, with a special mention to the Thornbury Turf Strokers cricket team, who have worked with my office over a number of months to address the ongoing issues with the power supply. I look forward to understanding more about the broader package of upgrades and what it means for the magnificent Yarra Bend Park in my electorate.

PRAHRAN ELECTORATE

Mr HIBBINS (Prahran) (13:44): (5316) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing, and I ask: will any of the funding for housing initiatives in this year’s budget be expended within the Prahran electorate, and if so, where, when and how many units? I was certainly pleased to see the state government make housing a priority in the recent state budget. It has certainly been one of my priorities since being elected, so I would like to know if any of the new homes from the Big Housing Build will be built in the Prahran electorate. It certainly is needed; there is no doubt about that. I would also welcome the energy efficiency upgrades for social housing properties, including air conditioning, so I again ask if any of the public housing homes in the Prahran electorate are going to be upgraded. Residents living in the towers have regularly contacted me in the summer months needing air conditioning installed in their homes. In terms of upgrades to the towers, a few levels of the towers were done in Horace Petty years ago with the promise that there were more to be completed, but that never eventuated, so upgrades are long overdue. We need more public housing and we need better public housing within the Prahran electorate.

ELTHAM ELECTORATE

Ms WARD (Eltham) (13:45): (5317) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. In the recent Andrews Labor government state budget my community will benefit from the $117 million local road and intersection upgrades program, for which I thank the minister. The intersection at Ryans, Wallowa and Allendale roads will be upgraded, with the road widened at the intersection and traffic lights upgraded to improve traffic flow and boost safety. These changes will make it easier for drivers to turn and improve peak-hour congestion. With the St Helena Secondary College nearby, along with the St Helena Marketplace, this is a busy area, especially after school pick-up. The community has joined with me in advocating for improvements to this intersection. Minister, when will these much-needed works begin?

BRIGHTON ELECTORATE

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:46): (5318) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and I ask: can the minister advise me what this Labor government is doing to stop home invasions and other serious crimes in Brighton? Enough is enough. We all have the right
to be safe in our homes. Last week a Brighton family was home invaded. Later in the week residents poured out of their homes to attend a community meeting. They deserve to be heard by this government. Residents are scared because serious crimes keep happening in our areas. Parts of Brighton have been targeted repeatedly. There is a pattern of serious and aggravated crime in a number of Brighton’s streets. My community not only feels unsafe; this home invasion shows that family who was home invaded was unsafe. For months I have warned the minister of an increasing pattern of crime in my community. The government is ignoring our safety. My community deserves protection. We demand action.

NARRE WARREN SOUTH ELECTORATE

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (13:47): (5319) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it is regarding the recently announced funding for the upgrade of the South Gippsland Highway in the state budget 2020–21. Minister, what impact will this upgrade from Lynbrook Boulevard to the Dandenong Bypass have on my constituents in Narre Warren South? I was thrilled to see that the government is providing $12.63 million for this upgrade—as thrilled as my neighbouring member, the member for Cranbourne. The investment adds to the government’s strong record on transport infrastructure investment in and around Narre Warren South. I would appreciate any information on how this upgrade of the South Gippsland Highway will assist my constituents, and I look forward to sharing the minister’s response with my community.

Motions

BUDGET PAPERS 2020–21

Debate resumed.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (13:48): I will continue with my contribution. I am going to move across to youth justice. Youth justice is something that is so important in Victoria when we are talking about crime prevention and when we are talking about the lives of young people and some of the changes that we can make. It is quite disappointing when we look at the budget that the government is proudly promoting the fact they are borrowing $154 billion but at the same time there appears to be no money for youth diversion programs. I think it is really important that I get on record my view of how we should work with and deal with young people.

We all know there are specific crimes in the world for which there needs to be a set penalty, which is going to be incarceration. There are set crimes out there that that is just going to happen with. But one of the changes we are seeing around the world is how we can divert funding away from just having effectively a ‘lock them up and throw away the key’ system to working with young people to give them the tools to be better in life. That is a positive for the community, it is a positive for the young person and at the end of the day if young people are not breaking into homes everybody is a winner because community safety comes out of that as well.

I had the pleasure of going across to Liverpool a couple of years ago, and we spoke about some of the programs over there. They had a wraparound service effectively where they brought in the police, they brought in the department of health and they brought in the local council. There are so many opportunities that we just miss over here because we do not get that kind of funding put into those areas. The only way to get the level of funding that is required for programs like that is to take a risk, but then we will start to see a reduction in the number of young people who are incarcerated. The less money we spend on incarceration and the more money we spend on prevention, over time it is obvious we are just going to start to see the effects that will have.

This government talks a lot—a lot—about how they are going to deal with young people, and we know that Cherry Creek is one of the ones that is coming up. Now, we cannot talk too much about Cherry Creek, and the reason for that is budget paper 4 is missing. So we cannot actually tell you if it is on time, if it is on budget. We cannot tell you how many beds are going to be in there because it has
changed a few times. We cannot tell you what the facility is going to offer, because that has changed a few times as well.

I could go on about Cherry Creek for a while, but I would prefer to focus on how we are going to work with these young people going forward. We are starting to see, even in the United States, some changes in what they are doing and how they are spending their money on young people to try and avoid them going into the prison system. Over the past 10 years I have had an opportunity to travel to America to have discussions with different organisations over there and tour some of the facilities. I went through Maryland, and Maryland’s system design was probably one that was a bit of a shock. The system for young people was to make the place of staying, the detention centre, as close to the appearance of a jail when you walk in so that there was less of a change for a young person going through. Now, I think we would all agree that that is just not the way to deal with it. You do not bring young people into incarceration to prepare them for the next level of the jail system. It is not practical. It is not real. It is not something anyone would want to see going forward. However, if you go to other parts of America, even down in Texas, and see the changes they have made to keep young people out, we have got a golden opportunity to get those programs in place and work with those young people.

What we see here in Victoria at the moment is that the average daily number of young people on community-based orders—and this was in the budget paper—has declined, but we are not seeing the evidence of where the funding is coming from for the diversion programs. With some of the funding that is there from the past and looking at 2020–21, there is no evidence of an increase in diversion programs. However, we also do not understand or cannot see how the evaluation of these programs has been done. I think it is really important that we see the outcomes of these programs, and the reason I say that is not just in a political sense; it is actually for the community to know that their money is being invested wisely and then for the government to be able to go back, look at what is happening in those results and start to project how they can reduce costs within the detention centres and what they are spending in there. It really is a golden opportunity to start that process that we were talking about before.

I will go over to roads. We know from past budgets that have come up that there are 60 capital projects that we know of at the moment that have been hidden because of the failure to produce budget paper 4, which is very disappointing. So again we cannot tell you which ones are over budget and which ones are over time, but we know that there are 60 in there that are already known to be over budget and over time. When you have got a government that has been in place for 17 of 21 years, they have to take responsibility for regional roads and for Melbourne roads. They talk about their big-spending budget, yet we are not sure what is happening with some of the local roads down my way like Koo Wee Rup Road. Koo Wee Rup Road has potholes that trucks could nearly disappear in—like, the size of the potholes is just massive. We have gone down there with some of the local communities. The member for Bass—it is actually in her electorate—I am sure has driven on that road and on occasion would be worried about the damage to her car as she drives on that road between one end of her electorate and the other because of the size of the potholes. Where we are talking about is not an area the government is committed to upgrading. It needs to get down there and focus on making sure those roads are safe. Road safety is paramount. Road safety is so important across Victoria. We hear it from every person here when we talk about how it is not a number, it is not a statistic when it is a toll; it is an empty seat at a Christmas table every year. So road safety is something that we need to be really, really focused on.

We have seen again that this government is going to take $1.5 billion from the Transport Accident Commission over the next four years. It is $1.5 billion out of the TAC. Again, if they are borrowing $154 billion and they have got no repayment plan for what is going to happen in relation to the budget or the repair of the budget over time, I cannot understand why you would then take $1.5 billion out that you could invest in road safety measures, whether that is road upgrades, education, working with people to make sure that they can be better drivers, changing the systems that we have to improve the roads or understanding the quality of the roads that we have out there.
The other thing the government has done—this is a small cost, Speaker, and I am sure in your role you would absolutely understand the cost of it; I will not go too much into the detail of it—is remove the road safety committee. There is no reason—no reason—why that committee does not exist, other than the fact that this government made the decision to remove it. It was a committee that recommended things like seatbelts in Victoria. We all know that more than 1000 people died on the roads in Victoria only two or three decades ago. We have got more people on the roads and cars are safer, but those cars are safer because the standards changed. I think Victoria should be proud, because over time we have led the change. From this state, governments on all sides have at some stage made recommendations that led to Australian changes to cars. Cars are better today than they have ever been.

Now, I think I had this discussion with the member for Eltham last time. I drove a Sigma as my first car; my dad had a Sandman. I would much prefer the Sandman; I know that. If you go back over time, those cars were not safe. They were cool but they were not safe. It was back in a day when you could put a bar across the back of it, hang a seat on it and that was the kid’s seat. Things have changed. Everything has changed. The way we deal with people has changed.

We can put a system in place which is all about the penalty—if you get caught speeding, you will get a fine—but we need to start talking about what we can do with education. I would actually say to the government: instead of taking $1.5 billion out of the TAC over four years, why not put even $500 million of that into a genuine program for young people between the ages of 16 and 18 whilst in the education system to learn to drive. What a magnificent idea, rather than just ripping it out.

The government said they put $100 million-plus dollars into road safety last time around youth. Half of that went into a museum in Melbourne which most of those kids will never go to or invest in. The others get around 1 to 2 hours at-school education, not actual physical education or up-front education.

We know, depending on where you are in Victoria, that there are socio-economic areas that really struggle to get their 120 hours up. That is a fact. You cannot change that. I have got a daughter who is 17. We are very lucky: she just turned 17 this Saturday, and she has got 100 hours up of her 120 hours because we make her drive that 5 minutes to school or the 5 minutes down the road. We teach her as much as we can, but not everyone has that same opportunity.

If you are taking $1.5 billion out of the TAC, there is nothing stopping us going back into the education system and even offering—it does not have to be a program in the school hours—a program to young people, not just the L2P but a paid section where we can get kids out there to learn how to drive and understand the road safety measures out there. I just think it is so, so important.

I will finish off in the Gembrook electorate. Overall we were quite disappointed. Obviously we spoke about Emerald Secondary College, but overall in the electorate we have not really go much there that we can talk about in this budget. What I will say is that we have been quite lucky with some of the funding coming through from the federal government, particularly around our road upgrades in the area, with lights and intersections along Glismann Road and O’Neil Road. The government have funded that federally. As well there is funding from the council. All it took from the state government was for them to sign a piece of paper. Even that was delayed and took a long time to get.

Just last week I was walking through Beaconsfield with my wife when an accident happened at Glismann Road where we are waiting on one of those sets of lights. Luckily no-one was injured. I was first on the scene there, and if anyone has been to a car accident when you are the first on the scene and the first thing you see is a child in the back seat of the car, your heart drops. You are not quite sure, and obviously there was a panic around the area. Everyone ended up okay from it. One person—obviously I will not go into details of who was wrong and right—cut someone off, and they hit at 80 kilometres an hour. There were no brakes. They hit at 80 kilometres an hour straight into the side of the car. So you can imagine the potential for what could have happened there.

It is really important, if this government is going to borrow $155 billion, if this Parliament is going to allow that and put the debt onto not just my kids but their kids and their grandkids, that that money is
invested in making sure that we can fix the roads and make them safe. I do not think that is going to happen, and the reason I do not think it is not going to happen is that you have got a government that is more interested in taking $1.5 billion out of road safety and stopping things that are going to protect drivers on the road. We need to make sure that Victorians are safer on our roads. That is why I think this budget has missed a golden opportunity when you are borrowing that much money.

Sitting suspended 2.00 pm until 3.01 pm.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 8 December.

Matters of public importance

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

The SPEAKER (15:01): Order! I have accepted a statement from the member for Ripon proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house expresses deep concern in the funding priorities and economic management of the Andrews Labor government due to:

1. cuts to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, at the same time the commission is actively investigating the actions of the Andrews Labor government and former and current Labor MPs;
2. public concerns from the Victorian Ombudsman about budget funding cuts, at the same time the Ombudsman is actively investigating allegations of human rights breaches, branch stacking and irregularities in awarding grants by the Andrews Labor government;
3. the decision by Standard & Poor’s to double downgrade Victoria’s long-held AAA credit rating;
4. no clear repayment plan by the Premier or Treasurer to repay $155 billion worth of state debt and an annual interest bill of more than $4 billion.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (15:01): Once upon a time Victoria had a Treasurer who claimed to be financially responsible. Now, he was not actually—and I will get to that—but he did claim financial responsibility. He had many ways in which he tried to tell Victorians that he and his government were responsible, and one of those was in relation to the AAA credit rating. Back in 2016 the Treasurer was full of bonhomie and he was saying that Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s had both reaffirmed the AAA credit rating and that Standard & Poor’s had not made it clear that Victoria’s—credit rating had been achieved because, in his view, they had been spending wisely. The Treasurer had also previously said that he would like to make it clear:

… in saying that will keep the AAA rating, Standard & Poor’s has only recently—as recently as Friday—and this was back in September 2015—

made it clear that we have a very well managed economy and a very strong economy.

That was back in the days when he liked quoting from Standard & Poor’s and listening to what they had to say.

Then of course in November 2018 the government had a financial management plan that it put to the people of Victoria that was their election document. It was the costings of their election promises for this period, if they were to be re-elected, and they were re-elected. But in the middle of that it said that they would stabilise net debt at 12 per cent of gross state product (GSP) over the medium term while retaining Victoria’s AAA credit rating.

Now let us just look at that statement, because that goes to my claim that the Treasurer never really believed in financial good management. The fact is that the Treasurer was planning to double Victoria’s debt—double Victoria’s debt—before any disaster had befallen us. And he could not foresee that there would be the terrible bushfires and then COVID, but that is the point—you cannot foresee a disaster; you have to plan and be prudent as if one may come. And this Treasurer did not do that. This Treasurer was already taxing Victorians at the highest rate of any state and spending at a phenomenal rate, doubling our debt to 12 per cent of GSP. And then along comes COVID. And what
happens? Of course the government needs to spend when you have an event like COVID. Nobody has any argument with the government running a budget deficit this year and next year. They have no argument with there being an increase in debt. But what we do have an argument with and what in fact Standard & Poor’s has an argument with is the scale to which this government has gone into a spending and debt binge with its ears pinned back.

So let us look at what Standard & Poor’s said when they downgraded Victoria, not one notch but two notches. They said that Victoria’s economy has been hit harder than other Australian states and territories due to its second wave of coronavirus infections, which triggered a ‘substantial and prolonged lockdown’. Well, let us not forget why we had to have that second wave, and that was because this government could not manage hotel quarantine, and the Coate inquiry has made a finding in that respect in its interim report. We had a second lockdown that has destroyed our economy and tragically taken 800 Victorians lives because they could not manage quarantine. But S&P went on to say, that in their view:

… the Victorian government’s path to fiscal repair will be more challenging and prolonged than other states because of the significant increase in debt stock projected over the next few years.

And there it is. We lost two notches, not one, on our rating from AAA. We were at the top and now we are at the bottom of all the states because of debt—because this government is taking on too much debt and has no plan to repay it at any time soon. So of course now when the Treasurer is asked about what he thinks about what credit agencies have to say, he cherrypicks the bits he thinks are nice out of the S&P report, but then he says, and he said this in the house yesterday:

… to be very clear, and I will be clear about this, this government is not setting its policies … on the back of creditworthiness assessments by international credit agencies.

 Apparently, they do not count anymore. The credit agencies do not matter anymore, because—

A member: ‘They don’t agree with us’—they don’t agree with the government.

Ms STALEY: How convenient, indeed. They do not agree. Now, there is one other thing that the Treasurer does not really want to talk about when he talks about the AAA credit rating, and that is of course that S&P is one of the major credit ratings agencies—another is Moody’s. Now, Moody’s has reaffirmed the credit rating of both the federal government and the New South Wales government at AAA. They pointedly have not reaffirmed ours. We are still waiting to hear Moody’s judgement on the Victorian management of the economy. Let us see whether we lose our AAA entirely and we go from a double AAA to the lowest in Australia. There is no way this government can argue that its policies and its debt and its lack of capacity to repay, or lack of intent to repay, are in line with other states—not when the budget deficits that this government is planning to foist upon Victorians add up to more than the total budget deficits of every other state in Australia. Sure, spend to get Victoria out of recession. Sure, spend to get Victorians back in work—and of course our unemployment is above the national average, and women in particular have been very, very hard hit by the Andrews second-wave lockdown. But do not try and pull it over Victorians that running budget deficits that are more than all the other states combined is in any way fiscally responsible, because it is not. Of course it is not.

We then look to why this government is running this scale of debt and deficit, and it is because they cannot get on top of their expenses. And why can’t they get on top of their expenses? Because they have no conception of what constitutes waste and how to get rid of it. In fact when the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change was asked, ‘Well, how is it good policy to give money to a company that then goes broke?’, her response was, ‘Well, don’t sweat the small stuff’. That was half a million dollars, and I can think of a lot of businesses in my electorate of Ripon—

Mr D O’Brien: Community groups.

Ms STALEY: community groups—thank you, member for Gippsland South—many, many who would think half a million or even a quarter of that amount was a really substantial amount. It is not sweating the small stuff. All of those half-million-dollar wastes add up.
What about this week—$3 million not to build trams. The government went out to their suppliers—they went to Bombardier, and Bombardier went to their suppliers—and said, ‘Here’s a letter. You start ordering parts for these trams’, and then they discovered that the trams they were building are too long for some of the platforms and their network does not have enough power to power them. Well, they knew that beforehand actually; they just sort of had not put the two together. So what did they do? They went to those people and they said, ‘Well, we’ll pay you out for having ordered those parts’. But apparently that is not waste either.

Mr Rowswell: What a waste. They’re addicted to it.

Ms STALEY: They are completely addicted to waste. And then we come to the big daddies of them all, and those are the big infrastructure projects, the West Gate Tunnel and the Metro Tunnel—billions of dollars over budget according to those working on them. But how would we know? We do not know because of course the government hid that paper. They just did not produce one of the budget papers this time around because they did not want us to know. When we asked the Treasurer he did not know, and when Neil Mitchell asked the Treasurer—‘Just give us the top 10; tell us how much they’re blowing out by’—he did not know that either. How is it that the Minister for Transport Infrastructure can pull the wool over the Treasurer of Victoria’s eyes so comprehensively that the Treasurer does not know how much the Minister for Transport Infrastructure is blowing out the major projects?

Mr D’O’Brien: They don’t want to know.

Ms STALEY: That is right, member for Gippsland South. They do not want to know because this Treasurer has abrogated his responsibility for financial management. He has completely abrogated it. He has now gone from being somebody who could say that he was running a surplus, who could say that he was only doubling debt, but of course now the Treasurer is in the position of being the Treasurer that took Victoria’s debt to $155 billion—to 29.8 per cent of gross state product, the highest in Australia. He also has to wear the mantle of the Treasurer who is running budget deficits that add up to more than all the other states combined, and then, if that double crown was not enough, he can wear the triple crown, because he has lost the AAA. He has lost the AAA by two points, and we have still got Moody’s to rule.

So this Treasurer has failed Victorians. He has failed financial management 101 and is saddling this state with a budget deficit and a budget blowout. We have no way of knowing even how we will get to a balanced budget because the Treasurer, when asked, at best will say eight years. He will say, ‘I’m working towards eight years—2028’. And he likes to remind us about New South Wales in this regard. Well, New South Wales has promised that it will deliver a budget surplus in 2025. It said it is one year past the forwards that it will have a surplus. This Treasurer said, ‘You know, we might get there in 2028—we might’. Every other state will be in surplus by that point, and yet we will not be because this government cannot get on top of its waste and expenses. If it did not waste money left, right and centre, we would not be in this situation, and that is what Standard & Poor’s have said repeatedly in their document. In fact the one thing that Standard & Poor’s pointed out—that they pointed out in three places in their document—was the lack of expense control compared to other states by this government. They noted that they had been talking about the lack of expense control for months, which they had, and then they noted that other states had done some work but that we had not.

So the downgrades are not simply COVID. They are not simply, ‘Oh, everybody’s been downgraded’. For a start, we got double the downgrade of New South Wales. Secondly, the underlying problems within this downgrade were there before COVID. And now we are in a position where we have no plan. The government has not put forward a coherent plan to get us to a balanced budget and to stop Victoria’s children and grandchildren being mortgaged in ever higher amounts to this debt.
The other thing of course is that the budget included over $2 billion to start work on the Suburban Rail Loop. Now, that project has no business case. Nobody has added up how much it might cost. The government does not want to say, but the engineers are telling us that it is in the $150 billion mark.

A member interjected.

Ms STALEY: A hundred and fifty billion dollars. So we have got $155 billion of debt already, and we have another $150 billion on the way, or maybe he is going to jack up taxes or maybe there are going to be special taxes for those who live along the route.

Mr Rowswell: So it is actually more than $155 billion?

Ms STALEY: The $155 billion—that is the minimum number, member for Sandringham. That is the minimum number, because we have still got the Suburban Rail Loop, which this government tell us at every opportunity they are building—every single opportunity. They never walk away from that one. So how much will that cost? Certainly not the $2 billion that they are spending with no business case, no start. That is reckless. That is reckless to sign Victoria up when you are already taking debt to the levels that you are taking it for a project that you have got no way of paying for. If this government sign contracts on that, how are they going to pay for them? This budget is flawed, and I commend the matter of public importance to the house.

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (15:17): Quite frankly, this motion is absurd. It is a demonstration that those opposite are out of touch and they are obsessed with talking down the Victorian economy. While the Victorian people need leadership and they need a movement towards bipartisanship, what do we get from those opposite? ‘Let’s just keep doing the same old thing, talking down the state’. It is telling, really, how little those opposite believe in that in a desperate attempt to seek relevance they chose undermining the economic and health response to a pandemic as their hill to die on. Quite frankly, when you look at where we have come from, if you look back historically, we cannot please those opposite. When I was running the biggest surpluses this state had ever seen, they were not happy. Now that we have had to make an investment in the protection and the welfare of the Victorian people, well, at least they are consistent: they are not happy.

We can expect nothing less from those opposite, who really are showing themselves to be economic dilettantes at best and fiscal curmudgeons. They truly are, because only a truly tone-deaf opposition, one with not only a tin ear but a tin heart, would have chosen to go down a path that effectively says, ‘Well, let’s try and run a surplus’. We are seeing $20 billion of revenue fall out of—

A member interjected.

Mr PALLAS: We hear from one of the members opposite, ‘We never said that!’: Go and check the record—the member for Malvern, your brave and fearless leader, still there with his abacus, going on about running surpluses as the pandemic hit this state, as Victorians found themselves being pushed into unemployment, as this government spoke its values large and did what was necessary, and that was to get in and assist the people of Victoria. So truly tone-deaf, they sought to undermine the chief health officer and demanded surpluses and austerity that any credible economist—and of course I am not including anybody opposite in that category—and indeed even the federal Liberal government have explained are the way to ruin, not the way to rebuild an economy. Yet here we are with the member for Ripon yet again grandstanding against debt. Those opposite are nothing more than hypocrites. Where is the outrage at the $1 trillion of debt that their federal colleagues are racking up? And might I say, they are doing it because they have to, because the nation demands it just as the state demands it. There is not a gossamer-thin separation in the economic strategies that this government is applying and what the federal Treasurer is applying, because a government that sits by and simply collates its budgetary numbers in an effort to satisfy itself that it is running a rigorous budgeted process at the expense of the welfare of the community is a government, or an opposition, not worth its salt, quite frankly.
Those opposite really have a lot to atone for in terms of the role that they played throughout this pandemic, a role that has been seeking to undermine the community resolve around fighting this pandemic. And then, even worse, when the government is seeking to bring together a commonality of interest and effort to assist Victorians in a recovery, those opposite continue to be what they have always been: economic curmudgeons and of course fiscal dilettantes. Where is the outrage at the changes to the GST that Victoria has had inflicted upon it? It is more than any other jurisdiction—$4 billion over four years. Might I say those were changes approved by a federal Liberal Treasurer.

To the member for Ripon, I simply refer her to the words of the Reserve Bank governor, who on 2 December said that he is unconcerned by downgraded credit ratings:

What is of more concern is that people don’t have jobs.

But he did not stop there, the governor of the Reserve Bank. In his salutary lesson to every public official he went on to say:

To borrow now, to make sure that the economy is recovering strongly and that people have jobs, I think is entirely sensible.

So you have seen a lot of sense in the budget that this government brought down, and you have heard a lot of nonsense from those opposite, but of course we are living true to our values. This budget is about jobs. It is about getting Victorians back to work. Now, if I may, it just illustrates the desperation for the need for a news grab of those opposite. But if the member for Ripon cares for my counsel, it would not be to put out an economic plan that directly contradicts the best and most robust economic thinking in this nation and, might I say, that reflects a disproportionately high level of consensus from economists across a very wide range. Economics is complex; I grant you that. I understand. But to dumb it down—because I think I will need to—and to give binary options to nuanced questions of economic policy, well, it frankly says more about the questioner than the respondent. They are for the sensationalised tabloid headlines; we are for delivering sensible economic reform and a plan for recovery that creates jobs and helps Victorians. Let us go back to the RBA and to the governor’s words when he said:

What is of more concern is that people don’t have jobs.

Well, that is the fundamental basis, the fundamental social licence, that we have with the people of Victoria. Jobs are at the heart of everything this government does, and jobs are at the heart of our long-established track record. We have created over 520,000 of them in the times prior to the pandemic. And it is important, because as we say in the title of this budget, we are putting people first. We could put a budget surplus first. Imagine what that would do to the wellbeing of the Victorian people and to the wellbeing of Victorian business, because there is something like $4.5 billion in terms of support for Victorian business and $1.5 billion alone in this budget to assist through tax breaks and deferrals and waivers of entitlements. All of that has been done to assist business to get back into the business of employing Victorians.

That is what we care about—getting and keeping Victorians in work. Because make no mistake, if this government did not borrow to support the Victorian community, as every credible economist has recommended, our economic recovery would be far longer and more painful. I would simply make this point to the member for Ripon: if your strategy is to do less rather than to do more for the Victorian people or Victorian business, then it will not be five, it will not be six, it will not be seven or eight years until we get to the point of budget repair and economic resurgence; it will be forever, because your misplaced priorities will be fundamentally damaging to the Victorian people.

I can note of course Terry McCrann, hardly a notorious or aspiring socialist, said this week:

… almost literally EVERYONE in the world is in the same situation—

except those opposite, who are on another planet when it comes their response to this pandemic—

running up huge government debt because of their own lockdowns and recessions.

He concludes that the credit rating downgrade:
… won’t make any significant difference.

With interest rates at record lows, manageable increased borrowing is one of the fastest ways to support people. Of course the splits in the bond issuance, for those opposite who are very concerned about whether it is AAA, AA-plus or AA, are massively contracting. Why? Because the market has already factored it in. The market expects that the world will be borrowing and expects that those strong, robust economies that are borrowing will demonstrate a greater economic uplift as a consequence. If Santa can bring those opposite anything this Christmas, may it be a better PR person, please, because the truth is that all publicity is not good publicity. The sooner the member for Kew, the member for Ripon and the member for Malvern learn that and save us all from their sermons on economic illiteracy or distorted and incomprehensible priorities, the better.

If I may, I will take the chamber just briefly through a few headlines of this budget: $6 billion in the Big Housing package, with $5.3 billion to build 12 000 new social and affordable houses; $2 billion for the Breakthrough Victoria Fund to drive investment in research and innovation; $839 million for the new jobs tax credit to encourage small and medium business to increase employment or to rehire staff; $9 billion for our health system, and let us not forget the construction effort that is going on there, including $384 million for Warrnambool Base Hospital and $75 million to purchase land and for planning for a new Melton hospital; and $3 billion to boost, to build and to upgrade schools right across the state. Thanks to the swift action of this government, this budget supports 125 000 jobs.

These are initiatives that deliver for Victorians in construction, in social services and in research and development. They are initiatives that stimulate our economy, that help it to recover and that deliver for those most in need. If the member for Ripon really thinks these initiatives are undeserving of funding, she should say so. Because if they would do something different, well at least say it. Identify the things that you would not do and demonstrate to the people of Victoria where your priorities truly lie as opposed to the rhetorical priorities that you use to undermine the wellbeing and the efforts of this government to preserve the interests of the community.

This is a budget to repair the damage. It is to heal the pain, and it is to make us stronger than ever before. We have spent much time doing that. We are using the strength of our balance sheet to protect business balance sheets and to help household balance sheets, because we are putting people first in our priorities. We are following the blueprint of jurisdictions around Australia and the world—okay, we might be doing it to a much higher level, because that is the nature of this government. We leave no stone unturned in our efforts to support and to stimulate the Victorian economy.

I note, for example, for the benefit of those opposite, that Victoria’s debt as a share of our economy will grow by the same amount as the commonwealth government’s debt—roughly 20 per cent. But as I have made the point before, their debt to GDP will be about 44 per cent of national GDP. Our debt will settle in at around 29 per cent of gross state product, so there is a profound difference in our material circumstances—a profound difference. Why? Because we had the strongest balance sheet in the nation going into this pandemic. But we do not sit around like people who prefer hoarding of an asset; we put it to work for the Victorian people.

The member for Malvern famously called for a surplus as the coronavirus took hold in Victoria, and it is for him and his Shadow Treasurer to answer why that metric is more important than supporting the community when they need it most. I will not be holding my breath for when that explanation is forthcoming. We even hear the plaintive denials of those opposite that in fact he never said it. Well, that is easy—I intend on making sure that a future speaker to this matter will be able to take you through the exact quote so that you can read it at your leisure during this debate, because we will play it back to you every day. If you want to see where our values stand, they will stand for the Victorian people. We will invest in them. They have never let us down, and their growth, their opportunity, will be the demonstration of our priorities being set exactly right. Those opposite will and do levy mendacious claims of cuts, but as with nearly everything they say about funding, it is simply nonsense,
whether it is IBAC or the Ombudsman. Of course with IBAC there is a 20 per cent increase to the base original funding—$49 million a year indexed every year from 2021–22.

Luckily Victorians have a government that is getting on with the job. We are investing where we need to to protect jobs and also following the advice of health and economic experts. Where would we be if we did not go down this path? Well, it would be professions of faith, pre-existing ideologies locked and loaded and Victorians abandoned. So that is what this government has demonstrated—a willingness to prioritise the interests and the wellbeing of the Victorian people. Why is that? Well, it is because we put people first—we put the Victorian people first.

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:32): I am pleased to rise to support the member for Ripon on the matter of public importance, but I take no joy in the fact that the opposition is having to speak on these matters. We have just seen a performance from the Treasurer that was, well, as the member for Sandringham said, all froth and no beer. He has come in at the last minute, he has delivered his performance written by his department—full of words like ‘dilettante’ and ‘curmudgeon’—and now he is gone again.

Mr Morris: And ‘mendacious’.

Mr D O'BRIEN: And ‘mendacious’—yes, thank you, member for Mornington. That was a good one too.

There are a couple of things that I would like to pick the Treasurer up on. This government loves comparisons. They love comparisons when they suit them. We have seen this with the repeated and banal comparisons to the COVID situation overseas compared to Victoria and how lucky we are that we have dear Chairman Dan to look after us here in Victoria because see how bad it is in Ireland or the UK or the US or anywhere else. But when you ask them to compare with the other states, they have a significant problem, and likewise, with respect to this matter of public importance—

Ms Green: On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to the ruling that says we are supposed to be referred to by our titles. The member for Gippsland South made a reference to the Premier that did not call him that, and I ask you to caution him and ensure he does not do it in future.

The SPEAKER: I do uphold the point of order. I ask the member to use correct titles.

Mr D O'BRIEN: The comparison that the government does not like, as the member for Ripon pointed out, but that it used to like is looking at the ratings agencies and highlighting how well it was performing. I go to Labor’s financial statement going into the 2018 election, which outlined all the wonderful things the government was going to do if re-elected in 2018, and it finished with this statement:

And we’ll do it all while protecting Victoria’s prized AAA credit rating.

So back in 2018 it was a prized AAA credit rating, and now we hear from the Treasurer that it is not really that big a deal—‘It’s not really going to worry us at all’. I am sure if we said in 2018 in response to that prized AAA credit rating, ‘Well, we don’t think it’s a problem, we’re happy to downgrade to AA’, there would have been statements from the Treasurer, he would have been out on the front steps and he would have been putting out tweets and all sorts of things on how outrageously irresponsible the opposition was, and yet now we have got the Treasurer saying, ‘Oh, the AAA credit rating doesn’t really matter that much’. And I might add he said in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week when I asked about whether we would keep our AAA credit rating—so this was only less than a week ago:

Whether or not we keep a AAA credit rating, as I say, is beyond my control.

Well, no it is not, Treasurer. No, it is not. You are the Treasurer of the state. It is indeed exactly in your control to keep Victoria’s fiscal responsibility intact, and you have failed dramatically.
I go back to the comparisons that the government likes. When I asked about this—and we asked about debt and deficit last week in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, just as we have again from the Treasurer today—he pointed to the federal government, and he said, ‘Oh, yeah, I’m sure you are upset about how much debt the federal government’s got’. What he has not answered—and I would like to know the answer—is how much extra spending and how much extra debt has the federal government had to go into to save Victoria from the second wave caused by the Treasurer and his government? That is what has really hurt the federal government.

In the December quarter, the federal Treasury expects that 60 per cent of JobKeeper recipients nationwide will be from Victoria, when we are 25 per cent of the population of this country. We had the federal Treasurer in August say that there would be an extra $15.6 billion spent on JobKeeper in Victoria alone because of the second wave, and that was in August. We were not even halfway through our lockdown at that stage.

I think it is pretty disingenuous for the Treasurer to point the finger at the commonwealth and others and say, ‘Look, why aren’t you complaining about them?’. I go to some of the commentary from Standard & Poor’s with respect to the credit rating. One of the comments was:

Victoria’s budgetary performance is significantly underperforming its domestic and international peers.

This is not just a comparison with New South Wales, which the government likes to look at when it suits it. S&P has said, against both domestic and international peers, the Victorian budgetary performance is significantly underperforming. Now why is it doing that? The member for Ripon touched on that. This is the issue that I get most concerned about—and many of us on this side and many Victorians do as well. Standard & Poor’s went on to say that Victoria has:

… more limited flexibility to repair its balance sheet through asset sales—

I will come to that in a moment—

and some degree of uncertainty about the government’s policy position with respect to expense management.

Now, if anyone is listening to that and they are not interested in budgets or economics I can translate for you: it says this government loses control of the spending; it has no idea. If you look at the budget papers every year for the past six years and you look at the employee expenses column and then you look at what the actual has been in a year’s time, you will find that this government has always lost control of employee expenses.

We could also raise the question of the infrastructure spending of course, and the infamous missing budget paper this year. The state capital program was not produced, allegedly because Treasury could not get the data. Well, they could get the data for every other budget paper that we always have, but apparently not for the state capital program. Why? Well, obviously because every major project that this government has blows out.

That is the key point of this matter of public importance. This side is not opposed to debt. Debt can be a good thing, particularly when it is cheap and particularly when it is invested in productive infrastructure. When it is invested in waste, so it is not an investment, that is the problem—and that is our concern with this government. Contrary to what the Treasurer was saying in trying to verbal us, saying we would be still trying to run a surplus, that is not what the position of the opposition is. Our position is that this government has gone far and away beyond what it needed to do in its borrowings and its deficits and its debt in the future, because it cannot control the finances and it wastes money.

We see that with the current four out years for the budget. We have a $49 billion cumulative deficit in Victoria, and yet the other states, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania combined, are less than that—combined it is $43.5 billion. That is the problem.

The deficit is billed to the debt, to the $155 billion debt, and the question is: who is going to pay for that? I mentioned before asset sales. We do not have the State Electricity Commission anymore. We do not have the Gas and Fuel Corporation. We sold those off to get through the debt problems caused
by the Cain-Kirner Labor governments, and it is going to be extremely difficult for future governments to actually deal with this, all because this government could not control its finances.

We had the Treasurer using the term ‘economic curmudgeons’. He was saying we are economic curmudgeons. Treasurer, it would be nice if you had been a curmudgeon a few more times, because the job as Treasurer is to occasionally say no. It is actually to occasionally say no to the spending priorities of your ministers. If he had done that, we would not have started this pandemic already in a deficit. The government keeps saying, and the Treasurer just said, ‘Using the strength of our balance sheet’. Our balance sheet would have been a lot stronger and a lot better able to cope with this pandemic and the second wave caused by this government if the Treasurer had said no once or twice.

I just want to finish briefly on the issues of transparency and accountability, which are also referenced in this, with respect to cuts to IBAC and cuts to the Victorian Ombudsman. We see on budget paper 3, page 384, a very clear, black-and-white 4.5 per cent, or $4.4 million, cut to IBAC this year. At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee two weeks ago it was just extraordinary. I asked the Premier to read out those budget papers and to explain to the Victorian community what a number in brackets meant. He refused to do so. He said that I was making mischief and misleading the people of Victoria, when it is abundantly clear that brackets mean a cut; brackets mean a reduction on last year. We have seen that this government has cut IBAC. It has cut the funding to the Ombudsman when there are active investigations into the Labor Party and its members and former members underway. For the Premier to stand there and say that what is there in black and white is not right—I hate to say this—is Trump-like. It is Trump-like to say the exact opposite of what the truth is. This government has failed us through its lack of transparency and accountability. It has failed on budget management. It has failed Victorians now and Victorians in the future.

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (15:42): I too rise to speak on this matter of public importance this afternoon. I am a little bit taken aback by the previous member’s comments around our ‘Trump-like’ government. I find that just the most extraordinary and ridiculous comparison, but I do not want to go into that now.

I do want to start by sharing a short story I was thinking about this morning that even the Treasurer himself may not actually remember. Mind you, a lot has happened since this moment that I will talk about. In fact if I cast my mind back, it was certainly during the middle of the year as the second wave of this deadly virus was about to take hold in Victoria. I remember sitting there in my tracksuit in front of the computer listening to an update from the Treasurer as it became really clear that we would need to lock down Victoria. Our economy was essentially facing a deep freeze until we got on top of this health crisis that was quickly unfolding before us. Now, during that update the Treasurer said something, and it is something that really caught me off guard. I most certainly leaned in to listen, and it is what I want to share with you today. Indeed I have repeated this consistently over the past six months to businesses right across my electorate and indeed the Wyndham community. Treasurer, you talked about how you would be working around the clock. You would be working tirelessly with your team to get ready, to plan for our economic recovery, because you knew that once we got through this health crisis and we got it under control and it was going to be safe to reopen, we would need to kickstart our economy. You said you would be ready to punch that green light and we were going to go in hard. Now, I was thinking about this with a smile on my drive here this morning to Parliament. Last sitting week as I sat and watched the Treasurer deliver our government’s bold and visionary budget I had to smile because it struck me, Treasurer, that you had just punched that green light. You had hit go, and it was all systems go. The Treasurer’s unwavering commitment and his team’s unwavering commitment and steadfast determination has involved months and months and hours and hours of planning, and planning that has involved the Treasurer and his team to think about all Victorians. This is important. They have had to think about all Victorians, especially the ones that need our government most, now more than ever.

And for all of the wonderful announcements on budget day that I heard for Tarneit and Wyndham, that we have been able to share in this budget and I could not wait to communicate with my
community, it has been our government’s commitment to create those 400 000 jobs—400 000 jobs by 2025, half of which will be created in the next couple of years—that stood out to me the most. That is the highlight of this budget, and those opposite continue to ignore that fact—400 000 jobs. I think they would agree we need to create them. Most certainly over the last six years we clocked up to 600 000 new jobs that we had created in the state—more jobs created by our government than any government in this state’s history.

Now, I think about if you bump into any Victorians in the street, whether they are in Sandringham—all that way over there—or they are down the street in Tarneit in the shopping centres, there are three things that you are most likely to ask Victorians right now, and that is their health, their family and you will ask them how work is going. And in my experience over the past couple of weeks, it is that question about their work that people are most worried about right now. There are so many people in my local community that have had their hours reduced due to COVID. They have been stood down or they have lost the job entirely. Now, these are emotional conversations. People get really emotional when they talk about this. They are worried. They are stressed. They do not know how they will pay their mortgage. They do not know how they will pay the rent or put food on the table. And how are they going to afford Christmas in a couple of weeks? We need to have an answer for them; that is the responsibility of government. We need to have an answer. We need to have a plan. We need to have a solution to unemployment. We most certainly need to have a solution to the insecure work crisis that COVID has really shone a light on this year.

I feel pretty proud to stand here and say to Victorians and to my local community: we do not just have a plan; we have just funded it through the Victorian state budget a couple of weeks ago. We have just funded it. It is big, it is bold and it includes an incredible spend—a huge amount of money. Yes, but do we need to do it? Yes, we do, and we need to do it right now. We are not just creating a strong economy for the sake of it. We are building one that is going to work for everyone, including hardworking families like mine, like the ones I represent in Melbourne’s western suburbs. Now, our government has made it clear that the focus of this budget is all about repair, but most importantly it is about jobs. That is at the heart of this budget. It is about jobs. It is about getting Victorians back to work, and indeed our government aims to create over 400 000 jobs by 2025. That is why this budget is so focused on funding those shovel-ready projects that help create employment opportunities for Victorians. Not only that, we are investing billions into a jobs program, including TAFE, to skill up Victorians and make them job ready.

What is disappointing is that the opposition continue to appear to be saying to Victorian communities that a surplus budget is far more important than the economic outcomes that our budget is trying to achieve. Now, of course we were all feeling a little bit disappointed, but not surprised, to hear that we have suffered a credit rating downgrade. I want to note that this is not unique to Victoria. We all know that because New South Wales has also seen their credit rating go down to AA. Now, I am certain that those opposite are not going to accuse the Premier of New South Wales and her government of poor economic management. We all know that does not fit into the Liberal Party’s image. But it is certainly naive, I think, to believe that we would experience a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic—yes, a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, the likes of which the entire world has never, ever seen before—and that somehow by a miracle our economy would be in the same position that it was beforehand. Well, my community is pretty darn good at pointing out and calling out BS, but they do not need an economics degree to know that having gone through a global pandemic like we have just gone through, the economy is not going to be in as good a condition as we started.

The economic impacts were absolutely foreseen. We know that, and that should be no surprise to anybody here in this place. But we have also been clear; we have been clear that this credit impact is reflective of the way that coronavirus has affected not only our economy but the global economy. We are not saying that these ratings are unimportant—no-one is saying that here today—but the only way to get that AAA rating back is through an economic recovery. We cannot afford to chase our credit rating before creating jobs and reducing unemployment, and that is exactly what today I think it has
been two speakers from that side of the house have talked about. It is at the cost of being able to create jobs and reducing unemployment.

If there is anything we know about experiencing economic hardship, it is that you do not create an economic recovery by austerity. You do not cut your way out of a recession. Our government’s budget was the right call to make in the circumstances that we were dealt. We listened to the economists. We listened to the governor of the RBA when he said that a bold and ambitious spending program was needed to refuel our economy. They told us that now is the time to borrow and spend, and that is exactly what we will be doing.

Now, those opposite were also wrong about how to tackle this pandemic. We are only here in the position we are, the best position we could be in, because we chose not to listen to their demands— their ongoing demands about opening back up, running into a third wave. We knew—that if we did that and we listened to them our economy and our budget would be in an even worse state with Victoria in the midst of a third wave. So I will not be listening to them on what our priorities should be. Instead I will be listening to the experts who are advising our government on how to ensure that our state and our community are not left behind in the wake of this pandemic.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (15:52): I rise to support the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Ripon. Before I move to my comments I just want to make the observation that it is a great pity that government members, and particularly the member that has just sat down, think it is necessary, in order to win the debate, to put words into the mouths of the opposition. The charges of us advocating a position of austerity are completely false. If the member had listened at any point to any of the contributions last week on the budget, that message would have come out loud and clear. As the member for Gippsland South made the point a few minutes ago, we believe absolutely in investing in the future. We believe absolutely that at the moment it is necessary to run deficits; it is just a matter of what you use the money for, whether you use it responsibly and how far you go, and that is the issue that is a question.

The other point I would make is that the member sort of said, ‘Oh, well, we’re both AA, New South Wales and Victoria’—completely and absolutely wrong. We were knocked down two steps, and we are AA; New South Wales was knocked down one step—AA+. It is a very different circumstance, and to suggest that ‘No, we’re all the same’, is just completely wrong. So let us at least keep those facts in the context of this discussion.

The year 2020, first of all, was a year of disaster, and now of course it has been the year of the pandemic, but particularly I think it has been a year of contrasts. The particular contrast that I have noted is the contrast between the way the people of Victoria faced challenges for the past 12 months and the manner in which the government of Victoria has responded. The people of Victoria have shown courage, they have shown discipline and they have shown determination. They have shown courage in confronting these almost unprecedented challenges that we have faced over the last 12 months; they have shown discipline by working together under difficult circumstances to not see off the challenge—we are a long way from seeing off the challenge—but to make significant progress; and they have shown determination to win that fight and get their lives back, get our lives back. The community has shown exactly the characteristics you would hope would be reflected in government. But sadly nothing could be further from the case, because this government have shown no courage, they have shown little discipline and they have shown a determination in only one thing, and that is to avoid blame.

What is the most effective way to avoid blame? Well, the most effective way to avoid blame is to camouflage—to be polite about it—what you are doing, to obscure the true nature of the operations of government. And I think it is fair to say that has always been the instinct of this government, but in 2020 that instinct really has morphed into something else. It has turned into furtiveness, it has turned into secrecy. Since the election of the government in 2014 we have seen a concerted effort to shut down debate, and where debate could not be shut down it was to be dumbed down. We have seen that
in the way the Parliament operates. With no disrespect at all to you, Speaker—it is not suggesting that the source is the administration of the Parliament. It is the way it is operating. It has almost turned into a mere rubber stamp.

But sadly so has the committee system. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which is an institution that I have a fair knowledge of, was once a forum to investigate the budget before it passed. The hearings were conducted, it reported back and then the house considered its position on the budget. That was a forum that was strongly supported by Premier Bracks. He put a lot of money into making sure it could do the job properly because he understood the necessity for a robust assessment of the budget before it passed. That committee has now evolved, thanks to government control—and despite, I hasten to say, the best efforts of the opposition members—into what is basically a PR opportunity for ministers. Those hearings will be completed hopefully before Christmas. The report will be done some time in January and I expect tabled in February. The budget passed last week. What is the point of going through the charade?

This year we saw an attempt to force the closure of electorate offices. Thankfully that went away after about 12 hours. We saw attempts to prevent members from attending this Parliament. Finally we saw an attempt for the Parliament not to sit at all. In the end, the government backed off. The Parliament has sat, thankfully. But they tried damn hard to prevent it.

The Liberal and National parties take accountability seriously. We take transparency seriously. That is why it was a Liberal government that established the Ombudsman’s position in the state of Victoria. That is why it was a Liberal and Nationals government that established the IBAC in Victoria. That is why it was a Liberal and Nationals government that established a freedom of information commissioner, which has now morphed, under this government, into something very different. The fact is Labor love to talk about accountability. They like to talk about transparency. But all we get on their watch is more secrecy, more cover-ups, more whitewash.

Mr Rowswell: More cuts.

Mr MORRIS: And more cuts too, as the member for Sandringham says. Victorians should be able to have confidence in the Ombudsman’s office and they should have confidence in IBAC. They have got to have confidence because they are critical agencies in the fight against corruption in this state. I certainly have total confidence in the IBAC commissioner, I have total confidence in the Ombudsman. Both are people of the highest integrity. But they cannot do their job unless they get the resources that they need. And both of those people, both independent watchdogs, have expressed their concern at the funding that has been provided. If we look at the annual report of the IBAC commissioner, and I am quoting, he says:

A strong anti-corruption agency must be independent, accountable and adequately resourced. The ability of IBAC to meet the growing demands and expectations of Parliament and the people of Victoria depends upon the resources, as well as the powers, at our disposal.

…

IBAC is committed to deliver what is required for the Victorian community; however, without additional funding, we will not be able to maintain current services. This will significantly impact our capacity to independently and robustly expose and prevent corruption.

The Ombudsman in her annual report says:

Most of the new functions and powers recently bestowed by Parliament came into effect on 1 January …

Whether I can make meaningful use of them, however, and indeed to continue to respond effectively to the increasing demands on my office, remains doubtful … and once again my ongoing funding has fallen substantially short of what is needed to respond to public expectations of my office.

…

… the apparent reluctance to fund my office could risk looking like an attempt to undermine it.
The government of course denies absolutely that the resources are inadequate, and particularly the Premier has been very voluble on that point. But it is interesting; when the Ombudsman appeared on the Neil Mitchell show on 2 December, Mitchell asked her, ‘Could she do the job properly?’ And she said, ‘On that budget, no, I can’t’. Neil then went on to say, ‘Well, the spin is actually you have got an increase. Have you got an increase?’ The response: ‘It looks like an increase when you look at it in the budget papers, but because I didn’t get enough last year I was obliged to run a deficit, so if you look at the total amount I spent to do my job, it’s a decrease’. The same day, when the Premier was asked about that, he effectively called the Victorian Ombudsman a liar—effectively called an independent watchdog a liar. He said, ‘It’s not based on fact’, and that is a response he repeated in this Parliament this afternoon.

You have got to wonder what is going on when the Premier of the state goes as far as he has on that point. So is this just a cynical attempt to hamstring the operations of two very effective and principled watchdogs? I think it is. I think that is exactly what is behind this disgraceful campaign from the Premier to nobble and discredit two key agencies fighting corruption in this state, and this house should express its deep concern at the behaviour of the government.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (16:02): It is with great pleasure that I join this debate on this matter of public importance. It never ceases to amaze me, the hypocrisy of those opposite and the flip-flopping that we have seen throughout this year—their inability to decide whether they were pro lockdown or anti lockdown. It was just flip-flopping all over the place. One thing has really struck me about this MPI this afternoon as someone who was a career public servant in the 1990s—and I have been in this place for 18 years; the member for Mornington is older than me but has not been here as long as I have—I was a public servant and a staffer in the 1990s and some of us do have long memories, is that they want to say that they invested and supported independent officers of this Parliament. Well, I have got to tell you, in 1998 I remember being a staffer here and the upper house sat for the whole night and Labor members tried to maintain that debate all night—two successive nights actually. One was on getting rid of workers’ rights under workers’ compensation, rights to common law payments—and how ironic when one of the clerks fainted due to the length of the debate. But the other one was getting rid of the independence of the Auditor-General, Ches Baragwanath.

That name, Ches Baragwanath, should be written in history never to be forgotten. That was the name of the Auditor-General who the Kennett government nobbled. A number of independent positions they got rid of: Moira Rayner as the equal opportunity commissioner. They got rid of industrial powers. There was no ability for arbitration to be heard, I remember, in industrial disputes, and ultimately the powers were handed over to the federal government, which still creates problems for low-paid workers to this day.

But I remember a great Tandberg cartoon. There was a dispute in what was then, I think, the Department of Community Services—and that is something close to your heart, Deputy Speaker. Child protection workers went on strike for 25 days—women workers who had never been on strike in their lives—and there had to be agreement for arbitration. The Kennett government refused to agree to arbitration with these workers who were fighting for better conditions so that they could support Victoria’s most vulnerable—and in the face of the Kennett government cuts. And this Tandberg cartoon, it was on a football field and it had a cartoon of Kennett saying, ‘Kill the umpire’. That is what the Kennett government was about. I have seen the talking points and the narrative that has been in every speech that has been run through this week. They have actually been a bit more consistent this week, I must say, in keeping to their narrative. There have actually been a lot of references to the grand old days of the Kennett government and sticking it to us about Cain and Kirner’s economic management, but they do not want to recall how that government in no way supported independent bodies.

But now I will go on to the other parts of this MPI. I have also noticed the other parts of the narrative, not in this debate but in other areas that opposition members have been talking about, where they have been trying to say that we have not spent enough in regional Victoria. So on the one hand we are building up debt and we have lost the AAA credit rating, but we have not spent enough in regional
Victoria. From the two members that led off in this debate, the member for Ripon and the member for Gippsland South, not one word of a project in regional Victoria that they would name that they would cut back. Their leader said, ‘Let’s run a surplus budget’. But now they are trying to run away from that, saying, ‘Oh, no, no, no. We’d just get rid of waste’.

Well, the actual economic indicators in regional Victoria are running pretty darn well. They are actually running pretty darn well. They are going to lead this state out of economic recovery. We have got our regional partnerships, which have been in position for five years now, and they have been working on job-generating projects. We have the lowest rate of payroll tax of any part of the country, and so those projects are ready to go. They are ready to go, and some of them are already underway. We have seen that despite the decline in house prices in Melbourne there has actually been on average no decline, and in many areas—like in your area, Deputy Speaker, and in the area of the member for Geelong, in Ballarat, in Warrnambool—house prices are booming. What I have always felt as someone who grew up in regional Victoria is that we can actually turn this crisis into the making of regional Victoria. Regional Victoria will be able to strut its stuff to Melburnians who are looking for a different lifestyle—or to those interstate.

When we look at this crisis, a one-in-100-year pandemic which we have not seen the likes of since the ill-named Spanish flu and then the Depression, and when you look at good governments worldwide, they use a tragedy and a downturn like this to be nation-building. That is what our budget is. It is a state-building budget that is going to get Victorians back into work, it is going to get them into training and it is building the things that Victorians need.

Everyone knows that we have been building major projects—roads, rail lines—and we have been criticised for a lack of investment in social housing. Well, now we have the biggest package ever in social housing, 25 per cent of that in regional Victoria. So are the member for Ripon and the member for Gippsland South saying that they do not want to turn that around, that they do not want to turn around economic and social disadvantage in regional Victoria, which is what our budget does? I saw when they had four years on their watch what immediately went up—teen pregnancies, youth unemployment. The member for Warrandyte as the then Minister for Youth Affairs could not even tell us what the unemployment figure was. But they made cuts. They made cuts to regional health, to community health, to women’s health, and teen pregnancies went through the roof. Since our government was elected, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria over the last six years I have visited many of the schools in those National Party areas, and I have thought, ‘Why is it that schools like Charlton College and Donald secondary college turn out such great results?’ Is it to do with their buildings? I went there, and I was disgraced. I was disgusted at the condition of their buildings, and I thought, ‘What local members have not been advocating for these schools?’ The thing is that the National Party and the regional Liberal Party MPs on their watch never invest in their local areas. As soon as they get the keys to those white cars—wooshka, they are off to Melbourne. That is it, and they are forgotten. The only time they find their voices is when they are in opposition, and I am disgusted with the member for Ripon, the Shadow Treasurer for the opposition and a senior member of the—

Mr Wakeling: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I appreciate this is a wideranging debate, but it is not an opportunity for the member to be attacking members of the opposition. I ask you to draw her back to the MPI that is before the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will rule on the point of order. Yes, I agree that it has been a wideranging debate—there have been members pointing out changes and differences on both sides of the house—but I do ask the member to speak to the MPI.

Ms Green: This is a budget that invests over $8 billion to help regional communities recover and come back stronger, and it builds on the $18.2 billion that we have invested to help support regional Victoria since 2014. This means more schools for local families, investing in the health care that all Victorians deserve and getting more regional Victorians into work. It means funding major projects like
the Warrnambool Base Hospital redevelopment. Would those opposite cut that? Would they cut the Great Ocean Road renewal? Would they cut the Kardinia Park stadium stage 5 redevelopment? We have taken the advice of the governor of the Reserve Bank. We are investing in every corner of the state, and do not let those opposite ever say we are not. I am against the matter of public importance today.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (16:12): I am very pleased to rise to contribute to this debate on the matter of public importance brought before the house by the member for Ripon. It is a very important debate that we are having, because what this does is it shines a light on the management—or should I say the mismanagement—of the budget by the Andrews government.

We are aware of the difficulties that this state and this nation have faced this year. We started off with the onset of the bushfires and the impact that they had on significant parts of regional Victoria and obviously the impact and the ravages of the COVID pandemic this year. That is not in dispute. What is also not in dispute is that this government needed to take action to deal with the economic impact of both of those significant events as they impacted on the Victorian community. That is not in doubt. That is not in question by this side of the house. What is in question, though, is the way in which the government has managed the economy and the way in which the government has gone about managing the budget as a means of dealing with the impact of those two natural disasters.

Can I firstly point out that the economic impact that we have seen as a consequence of COVID has been far more pronounced in the state of Victoria than in any other state in this nation because of the government’s mishandling of hotel quarantine and contact tracing. If the government had managed that properly, we would not have been in the stage 4 lockdown for months this year in Victoria whilst other states were out enjoying themselves and spending money. Businesses were open. Businesses were operational. Their economies were functioning. Victorians were in a stage 4 lockdown—locked in their homes and unable to travel more than 5 kilometres. That is one of the things that we need to firstly consider.

The second thing we need to consider is that when the government talks about economic stimulus in terms of investing to ensure that we can grow the economy, let us not forget that billions of dollars in this year’s budget have not been earmarked for new projects but in fact are being spent on existing infrastructure projects that were already underway before the impact of COVID or the bushfires. Major projects around the state, because of the way in which this government had failed to manage them properly, were allowed to blow out, costing the budget additional billions of dollars. So when we talk about economic stimulus, which is about employing people, let us not forget that major projects which were already underway—poorly managed, lack of scrutiny, wanton waste—have forced this government to spend additional money, not millions but billions of dollars, just to complete the projects. The other thing we have got to remember is it is easy for governments to borrow money. That is the easiest part. You can get the money, but you have got to pay it back some day. Now, as I said at the outset, we accept the fact that given the impacts of the bushfires and COVID the government needed to undertake economic activity to deal with the onset of both of those disasters. But it behoves the Treasurer, it behoves the Premier, to explain to Victorians their plan to repay that debt. Victorians have a right to know whether they will be paying for this debt next year and the year after, whether the debt repayments will be five years down the track or 10 years down the track or whether it is or is not going to be provided to their children and their grandchildren to repay. Victorians have a right to know: what is the plan of this government to repay that debt?

So as I said, the government needed to undertake economic activity, but if it managed those projects properly at the start, if it provided greater control around the contractors delivering those projects on behalf of the Victorian people properly, then we would not have seen the cost blowouts and we would not have seen billions of dollars provided to those projects under the cover of COVID as a means of driving economic activity when in fact they had nothing to do with driving economic activity because the economic activity was already underway. Those projects were actually still operational during the middle of COVID.
So the government just needs to come clean and provide answers to the Victorian community about those issues. As we saw, this year instead of providing those answers, instead of providing that clarity, they just removed a budget paper from the Victorian community and simply said, ‘Well, because of COVID it was too hard to put the budget paper together’—for heaven’s sake! The Victorian community have put up with a lot this year, and by and large they followed the rules. By and large they understand that the government has faced economic difficulty. They understand that, but they also expect to be treated with respect, and they deserve that respect in the budget, which they did not get.

So when the government is asked, when the Premier is asked, about cuts to IBAC, an institution that has undertaken significant work in identifying corruption—and we only have to look at the evidence of what transpired previously in the education portfolio. Work has been undertaken by that organisation to uncover levels of corruption. As we know, currently matters involving Mr Woodman are under investigation. Current members of this house, former members of this house, people from councils and my Labor opponent at the last election were also named in those proceedings. They are significant issues, and it is important that in the middle of the situation of investigation the government provides IBAC the funding it needs to do its work.

Now, the government, the Premier, in this house said that they would receive the funding that they needed and they would get a funding increase. Well, in fact that could not be the case, when the commissioner, Mr Redlich, in fact confirmed that they had not received the funding that was needed. I quote, he said:

… without additional funding … IBAC will not be able to maintain current services and its capacity to expose and prevent corruption will be further curtailed and significantly impacted.

The government needs to ensure that organisations like IBAC receive the funding they need to do their jobs properly. I mean, for heaven’s sake. The government is spending billions and billions of dollars under the cover of COVID and at the same time they are reducing funding for IBAC by $4 million. The government needs to provide an answer as to why it did that. But instead of providing an answer, the Premier said one thing would happen and the opposite was exactly the result.

There are concerns regarding the reduction in the AAA. A glib statement was made by a former speaker in this house saying, ‘Well, what happened in Victoria is the same as what happened in New South Wales’. Well, that is simply not true. That is the problem. Members come into this house and do not do their homework. They do not actually understand the facts. Victoria has seen a reduction at a rate far greater than that in New South Wales, because Victoria’s debt that they have incurred in this year’s budget is higher than all other states. The way in which this government has spent money is at a much higher rate. Now, one can make an assessment of whether or not the money has been well spent. One can make an assessment about spending billions of dollars extra to finish a project that was already started. They can make an assessment of that. The simple fact is: here in Victoria we have borrowed more money. The Victorian community is going to have to pay that back, and we do not know how that is going to occur. Come clean, Premier. Take Victorians with you, explain your repayment program and explain what is going to happen and the way in which Victorians will be forced to repay your borrowings.

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (16:22): I rise to speak against the opposition’s desperate matter of public importance submitted by the member for Ripon, the Shadow Treasurer. We have seen the member submit a matter of public importance which:

… expresses deep concern in the funding priorities and economic management of the Andrews Labor Government …

And in support of this position she has actually highlighted a number of matters, including Victoria’s credit rating downgrade. I note this because it strikes me as extraordinary that those opposite have identified these issues, like a downgrade in the credit rating, at a time when we are dealing with the world’s largest health pandemic, as we are navigating a once-in-100-year health crisis and at a time when we have experienced significant and extended lockdowns in Victoria. We have just experienced
a significant contraction in our local economy, and we are seeing increasing levels of unemployment and underemployment. Things have changed—2020 has been the year of a global pandemic. We are seeing countries in the Northern Hemisphere which are recording extraordinary numbers of daily coronavirus cases. Nearly 20 million cases have been reported across Europe and nearly 450,000 people have died, and in the United States more than 280,000 people have died.

So what is this matter of public importance at a time when hundreds of thousands of Australians have lost work and we have experienced Australia’s worst economic contraction on record in the three months to June and at a time when we know we are likely to experience a run of years of relatively high unemployment with low wages growth? What is this matter of public importance when we know women in particular have been hit hardest by the pandemic, when women are losing their jobs at a rate higher than men, when women are facing reduced hours of work and when more and more women in their 40s and 50s are finding themselves homeless? What is this matter of public importance when we are seeing an increase—a disturbing increase—in the rates of family violence and in the severity of that family violence? We know tragically there are many cases that are going unreported. And what could possibly be this matter of public importance at a time when we know that our mental health system is broken and needs fixing, when our waiting lists for public housing are too high and when we know that now more than ever before our health and wellbeing is just so important?

This pandemic has opened up cracks in the system, and we need to fix them. So forgive me for thinking that the member for Ripon, the Shadow Treasurer, could raise as a matter of public importance the need for Victoria, this government, to be doing absolutely everything to drive our economic recovery, to create jobs and to build back better and fairer than before. This should be the priority. That is certainly our priority. It is our commitment to the Victorian people, and the budget handed down by Victoria’s Treasurer last month makes this very clear. This state budget is the biggest budget handed down in Victoria’s history. It is the most ambitious budget, and it has to be. This is a budget for every single Victorian—for every family, for every community in every suburb and in every region across Victoria. The funding priorities in this budget are directed specifically and fundamentally at our economic recovery and at jobs creation. That is what is important. That is the priority.

But ultimately budgets are about choices. So whilst the member for Ripon and those opposite may choose a AAA credit rating over jobs creation and economic recovery, may choose a AAA credit rating over the health and wellbeing of Victorians, may choose a AAA credit rating over Victoria’s future, we on this side will not do that. On this side of the house we choose jobs and we choose economic recovery as our priority, with investment in health and mental health; investment in critical infrastructure; investment in our hospitals, schools, education, training, preventing family violence and promoting gender equality; and investment in public and social housing and aged care. And we are in good company. As the Treasurer reported earlier, last week the Reserve Bank governor, Philip Lowe, appeared before a federal parliamentary committee. He was asked for his opinion about the prospect of Victoria receiving a downgraded credit rating, and his answer? He said he was unconcerned, and:

A downgrade of credit rating does not concern me. What I want to see is strong public finances in Australia. I think we have that and we’re going to continue to have that. The AAA rating had more political symbolism than economic importance … What is of more concern is that people don’t have jobs. To borrow now, to make sure that the economy is recovering strongly and that people have jobs, I think is entirely sensible.

So the member for Ripon and those opposite can concern themselves with the downgrade in Victoria’s credit rating, but they will be a lone voice. The world has moved on. The global pandemic, the lockdowns, the significant downturn in our economies, the cracks this pandemic has opened up mean our focus must be squarely on economic recovery and jobs creation. The Reserve Bank of Australia and the commonwealth treasury secretary have urged jurisdictions to make use of record low interest rates to help stimulate the economy, create jobs and protect economies and communities. And that is exactly what we are doing. So to those opposite I again say: stand up for Victorians. Back Victorian households, back Victorian communities and back Victorian businesses. Work with us to drive
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Wednesday, 9 December 2020

Legislative Assembly

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economic recovery and growth and jobs, and please stand up to your federal counterparts in Canberra. Please stand up and make sure that you are putting Victorians first.

I find it extraordinary that the member for Ripon would actually use today’s MPI to suggest in the current environment that our funding priorities are wrong and, moreover, that we are doing things like cutting funding to IBAC when she knows clearly that this is incorrect—that it is just factually incorrect. It is just fiscally irresponsible. The member for Ripon knows that the funding priorities of this Andrews Labor government are about creating jobs, about economic recovery, and she knows that these must be the government’s funding priorities as well. She knows that very well.

The centrepiece of this year’s state budget is in fact about jobs creation, known as the jobs plan. This is a plan to create 400,000 jobs by 2025. A key plan is the profound investment we will be making in social and public housing: $5.3 billion to construct more than 12,000 dwellings. This is extraordinary. This will be life changing for so many families across Victoria. It will drive economic activity, and importantly it will create thousands and thousands of jobs—up to 40,000 jobs.

We will also be investing $1 billion in TAFE and training, including 80,000 new training places. Recently I was delighted to join with the Minister for Higher Education and the member for Frankston at the Chisholm Institute Frankston campus to announce $67.6 million to redevelop the campus down there. It is going to provide extraordinary opportunities for my local community, but it seems to me the member for Ripon and those opposite do not believe this is an important investment. They do not believe that young people in my local community deserve to get upgraded facilities and additional opportunities at TAFE in our local area. Well, I would say to those opposite: this is exactly the type of investment, the type of funding, that Victoria needs and deserves. We have to ensure that Victoria has the training and skills systems it needs as we emerge and build back better from the global pandemic.

This year’s budget also invests significantly in our health and our mental health, and we are prioritising building a resilient health and mental health system. Close to my home the budget will deliver on the promised $562 million to expand Frankston Hospital, and this will see an additional 120 beds, dedicated mental health facilities, obstetrics, maternity, oncology wards. Again I say to those opposite: this is important funding for my local community, so do not tell us that these are not funding priorities. This is exactly what is important. They are providing opportunities for my community to get the health care they need close to home, and they are creating thousands and thousands of jobs.

The budget we have handed down is about choices, as I have said. It is about funding opportunities. It is about creating jobs and driving economic activity. This is the priority of this government. It is the priority of all good governments across the world as we try to emerge from this global pandemic, as we try to build back better and fairer than ever before. We need to be supporting households and businesses and all Victorians—and not those opposite, who are not backing Victorians.

Ms CUPPER (Mildura) (16:32): Thank you to the member for Ripon for raising this matter of public importance—namely, the funding priorities and economic management of the Andrews Labor government. To point out the obvious, 2020 has been a year like no other. None of us could have anticipated the challenges we would face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the north-west, unemployment as a result of COVID was among the worst in the state. Two hard border closures and rolling Victorian restrictions caused enormous economic distress and social dislocation. It is going to take a very long time to recover, and that process is only just starting.

As the mother of a young child, a three-year-old, I am very conscious of the fact that he may be paying off government debt, just as every generation has. After the world wars, reconstruction of our communities and our economy required the government to take on massive levels of debt, but history has shown that it was proportionate to need and it was serviceable. It enabled nation-building projects that have served us well and will continue to do so even a century later.

There are differing opinions on the government’s current spending strategy, and I accept that, but I also note, as has been noted, that respected institutions such as the Reserve Bank of Australia have
urged governments to take on debt on the basis that it is the quickest and most efficient route to job creation and economic recovery. Interest rates are low and debt is serviceable, and this is the approach taken by other leading western democracies, including our commonwealth government. I know some have dismissed this as not relevant, but with all due respect I think it is. If money is cheap, if the rationale for borrowing is sound and if the money is being directed towards remedying longstanding inequities and funding disparities between the city and the regions, then I support it.

The budget announcements made recently have had a direct and discernible impact on the morale and confidence of our community. It has given our business owners and workers hope for a bright and exciting tourism-led recovery. For example, by funding the final $10 million to complete the Mildura South regional sporting precinct the government has signalled a boom for job creation both in the construction phase and beyond. With an AFL-standard oval with a turf wicket and light towers as well as a six-court stadium, a standalone pavilion, outdoor netball courts and much more, the precinct really will become a booming sporting hub for the entire north-west region. It will allow people to come together to play sport, which has obvious health benefits, but will also be a place of socialising and fun and bringing people together for generations to come. And what price can you put on intangibles like that?

In addition, Mildura South will provide my electorate with major game-changing economic and tourism possibilities. Mildura will now finally have a facility capable of hosting major sporting events, like AFL preseason games, Big Bash cricket, NBL and WNBL basketball games as well as state and national sporting carnivals. The flow-on benefits for our economy from hosting such top-flight sport are obvious: it will attract visitors to our town and our region and stimulate the economy for our small businesses and tourism operators. My three-year-old boy might inherit debt as a result of the fully funded sporting precinct along with a whole lot of other infrastructure projects, but he will also inherit the benefits of a world-class sporting facility that promotes health and wellness and social connection and job creation. This is particularly the case if he inherits the sporting talent of his father and not his mother.

The budget provided $9.5 million for Hopetoun P–12 College and $5.94 million for Merbein P–10 College to complete much-needed upgrades. The upgrades will provide Hopetoun P–12 with state-of-the-art facilities in science and food technology, while for Merbein P–10 the funding will provide a new library and administration and science areas. Both colleges have waited years for funding to complete these upgrades, and the 2020–21 budget will finally deliver the infrastructure investment those school communities deserve. Giving students the best facilities is an investment in our future. Having a modern, sophisticated learning environment will help stimulate and encourage our young people to grow and excel through their education. In my opinion the $15.44 million invested in Hopetoun P–12 and Merbein P–10 is an example of the government getting its funding priorities right. My son, Jed, might inherit the debt of the COVID recovery, but I doubt he will resent it, just like I have never resented the debt incurred after other national crises. I was actually not even aware of it until recently. Debt that is unserviceable and wasted is one thing, but debt that is serviceable and delivers quality education infrastructure to good, hardworking Mallee kids is debt worth having.

The Mildura electorate has long experienced a range of socio-economic disadvantage. This is the real and measurable consequence of isolation and the failure of successive governments for many, many decades to sufficiently account for that. As we always say, we do not want the government to do everything for us. We do not need it to. We have enormous stores of resilience and initiative and enterprise. But unless we have a basic minimum standard of essential services and infrastructure, we are spinning our wheels. We are unable to realise our full potential and contribute to the richness of Victorian culture, society and the economy, and then the whole state loses. That is a silver lining of this budget. It is not a neoliberal budget; it is a nation-building budget. That might not be appealing to everybody, but it was a godsend to us. In the regions we are not ideologically opposed to debt, provided it is sensible and serviceable and we get a fair share of the benefits. We can handle it.

I have heard others here today and in the media talk about how heartbroken they are for their kids for having to contribute to the repayment of the state’s COVID-related debt. Maybe I am a tough-love
Mallee mum, but my child, who is living in a middle-class home with a wealth of middle-class privileges, with a statistically high likelihood of doing well at school and getting a university education and a high-paying job, will probably be paying back this debt too. But my heart does not break for him. He will be okay. He will have benefited from the unprecedented investment that our region received as a result of the big spend, and I hope that he will have the sorts of values that will cause him to appreciate rather than resent the opportunities that this big spend has created for us all.

What causes my heart to break is not middle-class kids like mine who will have to pay tax one day but the number of children in my electorate who are homeless and living in cars with single mothers who have had to flee violence, who have barely any resources and who are unable to pull themselves out of poverty because of a dire lack of government housing stock. That is what breaks my heart. That is why the Minister for Housing’s announcement of more than $40 million for public housing in my electorate was a cause for joy and gratitude across all segments of our community, because everyone’s heart breaks for these families, especially at the height of summer in cramped, substandard accommodation with no air conditioning, and the minister, who is a hero in our community right now, addressed that too.

My son might inherit some of this debt, but he will also inherit I hope a system that is smarter and fairer—a system that understands that people cannot pull themselves out of poverty and contribute to the economy if they are living under a bridge or on the rowing club lawns, a system that reflects the sorts of values that I want to instil in my child, a system that does what it can to alleviate rather than entrench poverty and disadvantage, a system that gives a fair go to kids less fortunate than Jed, not with hollow rhetoric but with meaningful investment and resources. In total the 2020–21 budget has provided more than $150 million for infrastructure projects and services in the Mildura electorate. There will be spending on roads and rail, tourism projects and mental health services.

Yes, Victoria will go into debt in order to stimulate the economy and grow jobs and we will all be responsible for that debt, both now and in generations to come, but I think it would be remiss of us to ignore the long-lasting benefits that will come through the investment in these infrastructure projects. I know in communities in my electorate, from Hopetoun to Mildura, Robinvale to Birchip and everywhere in between, they are thankful the government has listened and acted on our needs, and I hope that my son will inherit the values that make him view the matter of serviceable public debt not with a sense of sneering resentment but with an appreciation of its key role in restoring an economy and promoting social cohesion in the wake of a global catastrophe.

Mr STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (16:41): I rise to contribute to the matter of public importance (MPI) moved by the member for Ripon, and at the outset I congratulate the member for Mildura on a very passionate contribution to this debate. The member for Mildura, unlike the opposition, understands that there are certain things that this government has had to do in response to what is not just a public health emergency but the biggest economic downturn since the Great Depression. It is all about making sure that people have jobs, because if you do not have a job, you do not have any hope of lifting yourself out of poverty. If you do not have a roof over your head, you do not have any hope of getting secure employment, of attaining skills. All of these things we need now more than ever post this public health crisis.

When I read the matter of public importance last night I was a little bit surprised. I was a little bit surprised because this is our final sitting week and I would have thought the opposition would have come up with something a little bit better than this. I know that very, very small party room has been somewhat distracted this week, but I would have expected—

Mr Rowswell interjected.

Mr STAIKOS: Yes, and the member for the ultra-marginal seat of Sandringham found that funny, found that absolutely funny. I have to say what I found very funny were the four points of this matter of public importance, three of them based on a false premise and one of them which entirely misses
the point. It is fair to say that those opposite have spent the entire year acting as though there was no public health crisis. I mean, it was at the start of this crisis, when it just took off—18 March 2020 in fact—that the Leader of the Opposition said that we should be able to deliver economic stimulus to protect jobs and deliver a budget surplus. The Leader of the Opposition was chasing surpluses this year, when there is not a surplus across the country—certainly not a surplus as promised by the federal government. Because after this public health crisis and the biggest economic downturn since the Great Depression it is up to every jurisdiction in this country, indeed around the world, to use the strength of its budget to create jobs and opportunities for their people. That is the social contract we in this place have with the people of Victoria. And that is exactly what this government is doing.

Those opposite can crow about debt and they can crow about the AAA credit rating, but this is an extraordinary year—indeed an unprecedented year. They talk about debt and they are concerned about our debt, which will settle at 29 per cent of gross state product; they, as the Treasurer said, should be absolutely mortified by the federal government’s debt, which over the forward estimates will be at 50.5 per cent of gross domestic product. I would imagine that the member for Ripon is on the phone to Mr Frydenberg to, I guess, have a go at him over the debt levels of the commonwealth government. We certainly take no issue with the debt levels of the commonwealth government because, as the Treasurer said in his contribution to the matter of public importance, the commonwealth government has the same strategy as this government, and that is to stimulate the economy. Those opposite would have you believe that we could keep debt low, that we could maintain a budget surplus and that we could maintain a AAA credit rating and provide economic stimulus. Well, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot perform a magic trick and have it both ways.

We need a jobs plan, and that is exactly what we delivered in the recent budget. We have a plan to create 400 000 jobs by 2025—200 000 of them by 2022—and the people of Victoria can trust this government to create those jobs because we did it in the last term. Between November 2014 and March 2020, 523 000 jobs were created in Victoria, and most of them were full-time jobs. That is many hundreds of thousands more Victorians getting the dignity of work, the human dignity that comes with a stable and secure job.

Of course central to this jobs plan are a number of initiatives, particularly around infrastructure and skills. I will name a few of them. We are investing $1 billion in TAFE and training to give Victorians the skills to get back to work, including providing 80 000 new training places over four years. That complements this government’s free TAFE program, which is assisting many, many thousands of Victorians to get the skills they need—and skills are going to be more important than ever as we recover from this pandemic.

We have invested $6 billion in the Big Housing Build package, which includes $5.3 billion to build more than 12 000 new social and affordable houses. Now, you know, if we did not increase the debt, we would never have been able to do that. But that was an absolute necessity because, as I said before and as the member for Mildura said, you cannot lift yourself out of poverty if you have not got a roof over your head. You cannot go and attain new skills to get a secure job if you are homeless. These are very, very important things—very, very important things for human dignity—and that is what we are doing. Of course I heard the member for Ripon on Virginia Trioli’s program two or three weeks ago say that she wholeheartedly supported the investment in social housing—wholeheartedly supported it. Well, that is fine, but she does not support the way we are actually going to achieve this, and that is to increase debt.

We have to increase debt to stimulate the economy: $2 billion for the Breakthrough Victoria Fund to drive investment in research and innovation; a $619 million investment in Jobs Victoria services to maximise jobs and help Victorians get into work; $839 million for the new jobs tax credit to encourage small and medium businesses to increase employment by rehiring staff, restoring staff hours or supporting new jobs as they recover from the effects of the pandemic; and $465 million to get our visitor economy back up and running, including more than $149 million to build new visitor accommodation, improve major tourist trails and drive more people out to taste the world-class
produce, food and wine on our doorstep. It is indeed a jobs package that is multipronged and that comes at this problem from a number of different angles, not just in infrastructure but also in assisting business now to stay open and to rehire, and those are very, very important things.

I turn now to the first two points of the matter of public importance, which concern IBAC and the Ombudsman, and both of those are based on a false premise. There is no cut to IBAC. As part of the 2020–21 budget, this government is providing IBAC with an additional $27.1 million over the next four years, which represents a 20 per cent increase of the original base budget from 2021–22. The increase in funding for IBAC actually means that its operational budget from 2021–22 will increase to $49 million and be indexed every year thereafter. As far as the Ombudsman is concerned, in this most recent budget we built on last year’s record $16.3 million funding boost with an additional $3.1 million. And while it is laughable to hear those opposite talk about integrity, I think that it is certainly a false premise to say that this government has cut funding to either of those important integrity agencies.

I simply say to those opposite: reflect on the year that we have just had. Just reflect on the year that we have just had, because while this government and in particular our Premier has spent every day this year, notwithstanding any errors that might have been made, staving off the virus, those opposite have spent every day this year trying to figure out what the political angle is going to be on this pandemic, and for that I say shame on them. History will judge them very, very poorly. They know now that that strategy has not worked, so they are running around like headless chooks in this place this week trying to figure out who to replace the Leader of the Opposition with. Well, there is absolute—

Mr Wells interjected.

Mr STAIKOS: Yes, and you can laugh that off.

Mr Wells: Yes, and I will.

Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I appreciate this has been a wideranging debate, but I think that the member is starting to attack the opposition and is getting far beyond what is contained within the four clear points of the MPI. I would ask you to ask the member to come back to the MPI.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member to return to the MPI.

Mr STAIKOS: What an original point of order. I simply say this: this MPI is based on false premises. It is a rubbish MPI, and what a way to end the year.

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:51): Needless to say I disagree wholeheartedly with the contribution of any member for Bentleigh. Just while I am on the member for Bentleigh and looking around the chamber—my goodness! The Deputy Premier is not here. According to IBAC investigations he received $4000 in fundraising from John Woodman. The former jobs minister is not here. Mr Pakula, where is he? That is $20 800 in donations from Woodman. The member for Cranbourne, she was here—

Ms Hutchins: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we heard from the opposition that the speakers needed to be relevant to the four points in the matter of public importance, and actually the current speaker is not being relevant to the MPI’s four points.

Mr Wells: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am not sure whether the honourable minister has actually read the MPI. The MPI clearly notes the work of IBAC, and that is exactly what the member for Sandringham was referring to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Sandringham had not mentioned IBAC, but I do ask the member for Sandringham to speak to the points in the MPI and also to refer to members by their correct titles.
Mr ROWSWELL: Delighted to do so, Deputy Speaker. As my colleague the Manager of Opposition Business did point out, it is a very important part of this matter of public importance (MPI) to be talking about the cuts to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, IBAC, and what I am doing at the moment is simply putting on record that there are a number of members in this chamber, members of the Andrews Labor government, who are not here at the moment and who have been part of IBAC proceedings or mentioned as part of IBAC proceedings recently.

Deputy Speaker, I do not suppose you know this, but I am pleased, privileged in fact, to have been appointed as a deputy chair of the Parliament’s Integrity and Oversight Committee. As a member of that committee, I know that that committee does very important work on behalf of not only the Parliament but in my view the people of Victoria. Going back to a public inquiry that that particular committee hosted on 17 August, I asked a very simple question of a number of people who presented to that committee on that day, heads of integrity agencies. My question was this: how much additional funding has your organisation sought as part of its bid for the next budget? That was my very simple question.

Now, in the time that has passed since then I note that the committee has been provided with some information but some information has not been forthcoming. It is a matter of fact that earlier today I submitted a question on notice to the Attorney-General, and I referenced the questions that I raised on 17 August to the Honourable Robert Redlich, the IBAC Commissioner, Ms Deborah Glass, the Victorian Ombudsman, and Mr Eamonn Moran, the Victorian Inspector.

I asked the Attorney-General in the question on notice that I lodged earlier today: one, will the Attorney-General on behalf of the Andrews Labor government seek to claim executive privilege over the information that I sought in relation to the amount of funding requested by each of these agencies? Question two—if the Attorney-General on behalf of the Andrews Labor government seeks to claim executive privilege, when will the government commence this process? Three, by what date will any purported claim of executive privilege be conclusively determined? And four, can the Attorney-General make available any precedent relating to the executive seeking executive privilege over the work and deliberations of the parliamentary committee?

My purpose in raising these matters, my purpose in lodging this question on notice today, is because the work of the Integrity and Oversight Committee that I have the great honour of partaking in, together with other parliamentary colleagues from both chambers and from across the aisle, is an important function of this Parliament and I am very keen to learn if the Attorney-General in fact seeks to claim executive privilege over a very basic question that I asked each of those agency heads—again: how much additional funding has your organisation sought as part of its bid for the next budget? Because in my view, if the Attorney-General in fact seeks to claim executive privilege over what would be a pretty straightforward question, a pretty basic question, a baseline question, then that would be extraordinary. It would be the executive seeking to impose their power, their control, over a parliamentary committee and, by extension, the Parliament. It would be the executive arm of government seeking to stop this very important committee of the Parliament having a response to a very, very basic question.

I can understand why the government would be concerned about such a question being asked, because in the words of the IBAC Commissioner they are very concerned about their resourcing levels and they have been for some time. Just today the IBAC Commissioner in his message of December 2020 published on the IBAC website says that IBAC is being asked ‘to do more’. He says:

There are also new legislative compliance monitoring functions and other requirements proposed for IBAC to improve oversight of Victoria Police’s management of human sources following the final report and recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants …

Mr Redlich says:

As Commissioner, it is perhaps my most important role to ensure IBAC has the powers and resources required to fulfil its legislative obligations. As calls on the agency to do more to expose and prevent corruption and police misconduct continue to grow, additional funding will clearly be required in coming years.
But who should Victorians trust? Because—and I again quote from the IBAC Commissioner in an article published in the Fairfax press earlier today—Mr Redlich says:

These increased service levels cannot be delivered …

So let us just think about that for one moment. IBAC have been asked by this Parliament to do more, but they have been given less. IBAC has an important role. It has a critically important role. And my friend and colleague the Manager of Opposition Business asked: why is that? It is very good question. And look, someone is telling porky pies here. Someone is telling porkies. Is it the IBAC Commissioner or is it the Premier? And I suggest to you and I suggest to this house and to those reading this considered contribution at a later point in history that it is in fact the Premier who is telling porkies when it comes to this.

A member interjected.

Mr ROWSWELL: It is. The Premier has told Parliament. He said:

… IBAC will receive more funding than it has ever received before.

He said that. He said that in this place: IBAC is going to ‘receive more funding than it has ever received before’. And then you get to budget paper 3, page 384, where in black and white there is a $4.4 million cut to the IBAC’s budget. The Premier has not only cut IBAC’s funding; now he is lying about it.

In the time I have left I just want to briefly cover the matters relating to the Victorian Ombudsman. Once again, this integrity agency has been forced under this government to receive less money in this budget to do more work. Their budget has been slashed by $2 million—$2 million has been the slash to the Ombudsman’s budget this year. Of course we know that the Victorian Ombudsman is currently investigating the Andrews Labor government’s decision to lock down public housing towers without any notice or regard for human rights. The Victorian Ombudsman, Deborah Glass, told the Age:

I sincerely hope this is not a deliberate attempt to undermine my office, but it certainly could look like it.

That is in the words of the Victorian Ombudsman. So once again we ask the question: who is telling the porky pies? Is it the Ombudsman or is it the government? The United Nations has declared 9 December is International Anti-Corruption Day. Well, here is a way to celebrate it: restore funding to our integrity agencies here in Victoria. (Time expired)

Motions

BUDGET PAPERS 2020–21

Debate resumed.

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (17:01): There is no denying that 2020 has been a year like no other. This year has shown us what matters most—our families, our neighbours, our communities—and I am proud to see these values reflected in the Andrews Labor government’s budget of 2020–21 with major investments to guide the state to economic recovery. I am proud of the initiatives and projects the budget delivers in my electorate of Williamstown and across my ministerial portfolios.

There is no escaping that this pandemic has touched every Victorian, and the community that I represent in the Williamstown electorate is no different. As a government, it is incumbent on us to not just rebuild our state but rebuild our communities and ensure that we can all recover. This is a budget that delivers the investments that will make this happen in the most effective way—by creating jobs. We will recover from the damage done by this global pandemic, and we will come back stronger and fairer. This is a budget that delivers this for Victoria and for my community in Williamstown.

Let me give you a couple of examples. We had $6.7 million in funding announced to upgrade and modernise Bayside P–12 College. When I told the principal this, we actually cried. It is an amazing
school that has three campuses throughout the Williamstown electorate, and it has always struggled to find its place a little bit. It has a really diverse community. A lot of Muslim kids go there—a lot of kids that go to the mosque as well. But what it really wanted to be able to do was to say, ‘We differentiate ourselves and really have a strong maths and science unit’. And they took me down there about six months ago to tell me what they had done to really recreate their school. They had had a look at their old library and said, ‘Look, we don’t actually use a library per se anymore. It is much more an online centre’. And they had redone it and turned it into this amazing interactive centre. I said to these guys, ‘What do you want from me?’, and they said, ‘We just actually want to share with you what we’re doing for our school and for our local school community. We’ve totally redesigned our school timetable so that we’ve got these masterclasses in STEM, and we’re going to bring in kids from our feeder primary schools and have these intensive masterclass days where we do STEM subjects to be able to really build that excitement’. So when I rang the principal to say, ‘You’ve got $6.7 million to upgrade your buildings and to create that STEM centre’, it was just such a feeling of empowerment to see something come together that had been the vision of the school.

Similarly, we have also invested $5.47 million to upgrade Yarraville Special Developmental School. Now, Yarraville Special Developmental School is a really small school with very old infrastructure. I have been there numerous times to talk with the students and to the school community, because they help some of the most severely disabled kids across the western suburbs. Some of the grants that I have helped them receive in the past have done things like set up a cafe so that kids there can learn some life skills. They were so grateful a while ago to get money for a front fence, because they had a couple of kids that were jumping over the fence and getting out onto Williamstown Road, which was incredibly dangerous. I said, ‘You’ve got $5.47 million to upgrade the school’, and that will be truly transformative for those kids. So, again, that is what Labor governments do, and that is why we invest in education, because it is good for our kids, it is good for our community and it is good for the economy. We know that valuing quality education lies in its ability to set every kid on the path to success, no matter what their circumstances or their ability.

I am also proud of the really bold social agenda that was put forward in this budget. Programs like the secure work pilot scheme and Victoria’s Big Housing Build will change countless lives across our state, creating jobs and supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I am really excited to see the announcement of the new secure work pilot scheme. We know what happens when we make workers choose between their bank account and their health, and it is obvious what consequences this has had in people’s lives. We do not need to look any further than the past year to see what happens when we do not support our casual workforce with sick and carers leave. The secure work pilot scheme will change lives, and it will include many right here in my electorate of Williamstown. We know that there were approximately 75 000 casual employees in Melbourne’s west at the end of 2019, and that number is about 20 per cent of the overall workforce in the west, where my electorate is located. Many thousands of people were thrown into the position of sacrificing a day’s pay to get tested and isolate when symptomatic testing was not a feasible option for them. This is a program that will go a really long way to fixing that.

Another initiative that I am incredibly excited about is the recent announcement of the $5.3 billion Big Housing Build, which will see the construction of more than 12 000 new homes throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria while supporting around 10 000 jobs per year over the next four years. It will not only supercharge Victoria’s economic recovery but also support and protect many vulnerable Victorians.

If I can give you an example of just how important housing is for families, for that cohesiveness and for keeping communities together, and how just a little bit of an investment goes a long, long way: a couple of weeks ago I was out in Churchill meeting a family with six kids. Over 18 months ago the mum and dad had been renting. The landlord had said to them, ‘You need to move out. I’m going to sell the house’. They could not find anywhere else to rent that could accommodate all the family, and mum and dad both lost their jobs. They ended up being homeless for approximately 12 months with
some of the kids going with some relatives and other kids going with other relatives. They ended up spending last Christmas Day being put up in a hotel for one night, and that was just heartbreaking.

Under the Victorian Property Fund they got a grant to build a Kids Under Cover unit. Mum and dad had managed to find enough money to get a deposit on a home. Now, that home was way too small for the family. They ended up with mum and dad sleeping in the kitchen, they ended up with a couple of the kids sleeping in the lounge room and then they ended up with a couple of the other kids sleeping in the two bedrooms. Now, as you can imagine for a family of six kids, that was a really, really hard thing for them to do, but it allowed that family to be together. When we went in there and gave them a grant so they could actually have a little room out the back—it had two bedrooms and a bathroom, was built right here in Victoria and provided that family with accommodation for four of the boys—it was just transformative.

So I went there, I met the kids and I met the mum. She was the most positive human being that I reckon I have ever met in my life, and she told me their story. Four of the boys lined up and took me in and showed me their bedrooms. Honestly, if my kids could keep their bedrooms that neat, I would be a truly, truly happy mum. But it is how that little bit of investment in social housing goes such a long way to make such a difference.

Similarly when I was up in the Deputy Speaker’s electorate just the other day, we saw again how a little bit of money can go such a long way to make such a difference in housing. The Deputy Speaker and I went and met a couple of new families. Now, these are people who are very much at risk of being homeless. Through the Victorian Property Fund we had invested in some new units in Bendigo East that provided some young families who were at risk of homelessness an opportunity to have a roof over their heads. One of the young mums that we met was 19 years of age. She had spent the vast majority of her life in foster care. She had a gorgeous little boy, and this was the first time she had an opportunity to have her own home. That was again something really transformative. This was money that we had already spent and just two examples that had an incredibly transformative result for a couple of families, but the $5.3 billion in this year’s budget is going to go such a long, long way. This is particularly welcome news in my electorate, where the City of Maribyrnong has been identified as one of the 21 priority local government areas.

This budget has seen some historic investments in much-loved cultural institutions in the inner west as well. A stone’s throw away from the electorate of Footscray $36.6 million is being delivered to expand the Western Bulldogs Football Club’s community programs and to provide a hub of recreation and community facilities that will provide incredible services to my electorate. As a basketball mum—I am fessing up as a basketball mum—I have spent many, many hours at the Whitten Oval with my son, watching him play or train or be coached. This funding will benefit not only the football community but also hundreds of families whose kids go there to play netball, football, basketball and a range of other sports.

One of the other critical opportunities as well is in Williamstown. The visitor facilities within the Point Gellibrand Heritage Park just near the Steve Bracks Promenade will be upgraded to ensure safe and equitable access and to facilitate community exercise and wellbeing. This upgrade is part of an overall budget package worth $52.4 million. But to top it off we are going to actually continue to fund the Westgate Punt ferry service used by commuters and loved by the bike-riding community. I do not ride a bike. I cannot say that I have actually taken up the opportunity to use the Westgate Punt, but I would like to give a bit of a shout-out to the former member for Williamstown, Wade Noonan, who is a passionate user and very happy that this service has been continued.

One of the things that is really clear from the conversations with people that I have had right across the electorate is that the world of work we knew a year ago has been completely turned on its head. That is why it is so important that we are seeing money in this budget to get people back to work. We are upskilling and re-skilling with 80,000 free TAFE and subsidised training places. It is clear too that women and young people have borne so much of the brunt of this pandemic, so we have got a further
$155 million to support the most affected to access government-funded training, and that is very welcome news.

This year my community of Williamstown has been faced with enormous challenges, and this historic budget responds to these challenges. I would like to really give a shout-out too to my friend the Minister for Community Sport for a fabulous program that I honestly think every child has won a prize through. Just that little seed money in community sport has kept the lights on for those community clubs, be it the Williamstown Tennis Club through to the Westgate Basketball Association through to the Footscray Trugo Club or the Maltese bocce club. All of these community sports engage so many people, and to be able to get that money to keep the lights on and keep them up and running is just a fantastic thing. So in conclusion, this budget delivers unprecedented investment in rebuilding our state and making sure that Victorians do too, and I would commend it to the house.

Mr R SMITH (Warrandyte) (17:16): It is my pleasure to rise to reply to the budget handed down by this Labor government. I would like to take members’ attention back to the year 1987. It was a time when I had just started in the banking sector as a clerk in the National Australia Bank money market settlement area. I was just 18. It was a time when it was my first foray into full-time work, and I was very excited about what that work experience would bring. The Melbourne that I worked in was very different to the Melbourne that we see today. The Melbourne back then had none of the vibrancy that we are so used to seeing now. The streets certainly were not particularly full after 8 or 9 o’clock at night, and it was a very, very different place. It was a place where the most prominent building on Flinders Street other than Flinders Street station was the old Gas and Fuel building. Jeff’s Shed had not been built yet, Crown Casino was not the premier destination for entertainment here in Melbourne and we had not yet stolen the grand prix from Adelaide.

But there are several other contrasts to be made as well. We had a government that was starting to bend under the weight of gross mismanagement of the state’s budget. We saw it with the years that came following 1987 and as we went into 1992. The government was handed from John Cain over to former Premier Joan Kirner, and in that time we saw the Victorian Economic Development Corporation, set up by Premier Rupert Hamer, slowly collapse, ending with over $100 million in bad debts. We saw the merchant banking arm of the State Bank of Victoria, Tricontinental, fold. We saw the State Bank of Victoria itself, the pride of banking institutions in Victoria, also fold and be sold to the Commonwealth Bank. In the banking sector I, like many people in many industries, saw my peers being retrenched on a weekly basis, saw friends leaving jobs with little or no job prospects to go to. As I said, as we moved into 1992 the public saw a state that had $30 billion in debt, unemployment at 11.6 per cent and the state budget in tatters, and the people of Victoria gave Jeff Kennett and the Liberal-Nationals in coalition the right to govern.

John Brumby shortly afterwards took the position of Leader of the Opposition, and every single day that he held that position Jeff Kennett as Premier used the economic and financial mismanagement of the Labor Party to beat the opposition leader back at every turn, reminding the people of Victoria how the Labor Party could not be trusted with the state’s finances or the economic future of all Victorians. And when Steve Bracks won in 1999 and shortly thereafter made John Brumby his Treasurer both Steve Bracks and John Brumby knew that they had a very, very long way to go to rebuild the public’s confidence in their own economic management. While I did not serve in this place for a great deal of the Bracks government—I served in it for a short while, for the eight months following the 2006 election when Steve Bracks was still Premier with John Brumby as his Treasurer—I can say that while I differ with former Treasurer and Premier John Brumby on many different things, many policy directions, I think that the public at large would have said that he was a competent Treasurer if I was being conservative with my comments.

This budget is not one that John Brumby would have handed down under any circumstances, not even in a once-in-a-lifetime, as those opposite call it, pandemic. He would have recognised the importance of this state’s financial standing and he would not have just simply borrowed $155 billion to spray around. I will say that borrowing $155 billion and running a deficit that is greater than all the other
states combined is not economic management. Anyone could just borrow that money and spray it around, and Victorians would rightly ask themselves, ‘What am I actually getting for that money?’.

Now, I talk about Labor’s economic mismanagement in days gone by, and those opposite say, ‘Let it go. Don’t worry about it. I can’t believe you’re still hanging on to that’. Well, the reason why we hang on to it over here and the reason why every member of this house, particularly those who sit on the Treasury benches, should hold the thoughts of what happened back in those years close to them is that if you do not remember those things, if you do not acknowledge the problems, then you will make the same mistakes again. It is one reason why I am a vehement opposer of the cancel culture we are seeing now. You cannot airbrush history away, and if you do, you run the risk of repeating the failures that were made in those times gone past. Some in here—and it appears that the Premier is one and his Treasurer is another one—have not learned the lessons. If I can draw similarities between the economic mismanagement of the Cain-Kirner years and the clear economic mismanagement of the Andrews-Pallas years, we see again record debt, massive deficits and cost overruns on major projects. We are looking at something in the order of $25 billion in cost overruns. Can you believe that this government is so embarrassed by their cost overruns they have for the first time in many, many years refused to release the capital works funding that is currently being allocated to these projects? It is an absolute disgrace, and Victorians really should hold this government to account for keeping that information private, secret and under a veil.

This budget has brought us, as I have said, the loss of our AAA rating. I have heard those opposite say, ‘Well, the Liberals hold the AAA rating above people, above jobs and above services’. Those opposite when they say that show me their inability to understand economics. You cannot deliver services, you cannot deliver education, you cannot deliver health and you cannot deliver projects unless the books are balanced. It is horrifying to me, and should be to every member of this house, the fact that the Treasurer cannot tell us by how much his major projects have overrun. It is horrifying to me, and should be to every member of this house, that the Premier in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings could not tell us if he has a repayment plan.

For those opposite who have not been involved in the financial sector or do not know the operations of Moody’s or Standard & Poor’s, those ratings that are given by those two ratings agencies are not due to debt. We all agree that at this time debt is not a bad avenue to go down. What those ratings show is an ability to repay. Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s are telling the people of Victoria and telling this government in fact that on looking at the books they do not believe that this government knows how to pay this money back. We have heard the Treasurer say that that debt is for the betterment of our state and for the recovery from the lockdown that we have had following the pandemic, but there is no plan. As I said, borrowing $155 billion and spraying it around with no plan to repay it is not economic management. That is just using the state’s assets to borrow the money and buy yourself votes and buy yourself some semblance of a way back from the economic conditions we find ourselves in.

The member for Northcote said earlier during this debate that budgets are about choices. I think I have spoken those words in days gone by when I have spoken on other budgets. The choice this government made, not in this budget but in budgets gone by, was to strip the health department bare. That is there for all to see. It has been well documented not necessarily only by the opposition but also by many commentators. The Andrews government made the decision to strip the health department bare. The Andrews government made the decision, in the absence of a pandemic, that they would cut back on a whole bunch of services and resources that we needed desperately when the time came.

We also note that in the midyear budget update last year, pre COVID and pre the Gippsland bushfires and indeed bushfires that swept through other parts of this state, the budget was already starting to be in a mess. We had already gone from a debt that was around $25 billion to a debt that was $40 billion. We then forecast after the bushfires it was going to $75 billion. Six months later—I completely concede we have had unusual times—to see that debt go from its lows up to $155 billion limits the ability of this state to deliver services in years to come and to deliver infrastructure in years to come, and it quite simply leaves us in an appalling economic state to deal with any future disasters that we
will see. Now, in my own area—and I know this is the same across many parts of the state—the lack of fire preparedness for this year has been appalling. You only have to walk through areas of the Warrandyte state forest and indeed areas of public estate across Victoria to see that the place is a tinderbox and we are quite open to having similar circumstances to those we had with the fires earlier this year. This state does not have the ability to fund the recovery from another bushfire. This state does not have the ability to fund the recovery from any other unforeseen circumstances that may come.

While those opposite talk about it being a job-creating budget, the Treasurer has told us that the unemployment rate in Victoria will remain above the national average. I mean, what an aspiration! What an aspiration for this budget. We are going to be worse off over the forward estimates than we are now. I mean, it is just appalling. We have got businesses that are not being helped. Again, those major construction sites, public servants—I am not denigrating one scrap of work that those people do—have been largely untouched as far as employment goes in the last six months. They are the ones who are going to continue to be helped. The industries that typically women work in more, such as fitness, such as hospitality and the creative industries, are not being helped at all—not to the degree that those major building sites and the public service sector are. This budget does very little for them.

In the time I have remaining I just want to move to talking about the budget more broadly. I will have to say this is the 14th budget that I have spoken on. Members should not underestimate the fact that this is one of the most important budgets you will see in your lifetime, because its ramifications will stay with us, with our children and with our grandchildren for decades and decades to come. The mismanagement of this Labor government over the course of this year and their supposed recovery will stay with every single Victorian for a very long time.

In terms of my electorate, well, I have got 12 schools—plus Heatherwood specialist school, which has received funding—that have been largely ignored. There is some maintenance funding, an amount slightly over $250,000, that has been given across just three schools. The rest, despite their need, have been ignored once again. This government is a mean political government who very rarely finds any room in the budget for the Victorians that contribute to the coffers in the Warrandyte electorate.

Sporting clubs who have been decimated by the lockdown, whose members obviously have not been able to play sport or even congregate and maintain that fellowship that they are so used to, have not received a penny from this government. Even the roads in my area have received no funding—one in particular, the Five Ways intersection in Warrandyte, which I have asked the minister to fund many, many times. I have tabled over 1000 signatures in here. You would think that there would be some movement that way if the government truly did govern for all Victorians, but we know that that is just simply not the case.

As I said, those who will not learn from history are destined to repeat it. Look back in history. Look at the parlous state that this Labor government left the finances in back in the late 1980s and early 90s. It does not take much to sit down and draw the parallels and see that the same is happening again. And there will always be an excuse. There will always be a reason from those opposite, but there is rarely a state budget or indeed a federal budget that is left in a better situation after Labor leaves than when they took it—rarely a situation where that has happened. I doubt very much, with what I have seen from this budget and indeed from the Treasurer and the Premier, that we will see a budget, when those opposite leave office, that is significantly better than they took office in 2014. Those who do not learn from the past are destined to repeat it, and that is exactly what we are seeing now.

This budget saddles every single Victorian with a debt of around $23,000. It will take a very long time to pay that back, if we are in fact able to pay it back at all. Government members will get up and spruik the benefits of this budget with barely a thought for those who will actually have to repair the budget going forward, with barely a thought for those who are saddled with the debt and with barely a thought for those who will not be able to take advantage of the services and the infrastructure that government should be able to provide because that debt will limit those opportunities so much going forward. I
condemn this budget. I condemn a government that has no thought for the future, only thought for the here and now.

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) (17:31): I am very pleased to make my contribution on the take-note motion for the 2020–21 budget papers. My grandparents were alive during the Great Depression and things were pretty tough for them. I have heard stories from my family about the spend that was needed across Victoria—indeed across the whole country and across the world—to recover from the Great Depression. My grandparents and then my parents probably wore the financial burden of that big spend back then. But you know what? They had good jobs—they worked in factories. They had a good income, they put food on the table, they sent their kids to school to get a good education and we survived it—we all survived it—and we will survive this pandemic. We will survive, and we will come out with a better economy and a stronger and fairer Victoria than we have ever seen before. That is because this budget is actually about looking after the people—the people who live in this state, the families who live in this state and the people that we love the most, who we know need the support the most. There is no question from anyone in this place that this year has been really tough. It has; it has been a horrid year. But I think this budget is about building our resilience after what has been a huge sacrifice for many Victorians, and it is about a plan to rebuild our economy, to get us back from what has been a really challenging time. This budget is big and it is ambitious, and it is for a reason that it is big and it is ambitious.

Before I continue I just want on that note to thank the people of the communities of Bendigo West for their support and their adherence to the public health restrictions that have needed to be put in place over the last few months. I have been amazed and surprised but also heartened by the great community effort. Seeing neighbours looking after neighbours and communities looking after communities has been probably one of the greatest outcomes, if there has to be one, from this pandemic. I want to thank my staff because at the height of the pandemic here in Victoria it was our electorate officers who bore the brunt of many, many calls from many, many people—some who were unhappy, some who were angry, some who were disappointed, some who were sick and some who just needed help. I want to thank them for that, because without them I am pretty sure that most members in this house would not be able to do the job that they do.

I want to talk about some of the great budget outcomes for Bendigo West in particular with our ongoing plan to make Victoria the Education State—it already is, but it will be even more so following this budget. I am just really delighted that there are a number of schools in my electorate that have received funding in this budget, and none more so than Maiden Gully Primary School. Maiden Gully Primary School is in one of the largest growth areas of Bendigo. It is on that corridor between Bendigo and Marong, and its population is due to increase significantly over the coming years. They received $4.59 million for improvements at the school, and that comes off the back of $510,000 that was announced just a few months ago from the Infrastructure Planning and Acceleration Fund. I am really pleased that Craig Arrowsmith, the principal, was able to meet with me—outside of the school grounds, bearing in mind the COVID restrictions—for me to be able to give them that great news. This comes off the back of the school community putting forward a petition to the Maiden Gully Progress Association, a petition that was presented to the Minister for Education and letters from the principal and the school council president as well. So I am very excited for that school.

Bendigo Senior Secondary College, which is up near Camp Hill Primary School on the top of the hill near the poppet head in Bendigo, received $10 million for an upgrade and modernisation of the original high school building, which is a heritage building on its own, located on G block. It is probably one of the oldest school buildings in Bendigo. Dale Pearce, the principal, is very delighted, because this is kind of the last piece in the puzzle of the redevelopment of the school on that site, because we have already invested significant funding to modernise and expand the school facilities.

Newstead Primary School received $2.46 million. This is again another 1877 building, and the original red-brick building sits proudly right there in the middle of the large school grounds out at Newstead. I am really pleased for them that they will be able to spend this money on upgrading the school. Kathy
Callander is the principal out there, but I also want to acknowledge Andrew Frawley, who was the previous principal, who had put forward to me when he was principal there the need for this investment in Newstead Primary School.

Chewton Primary School—beautiful little Chewton Primary School—received $1.42 million. Again, a beautiful little hamlet in my electorate is Chewton, with historical gold rush era claims. Bernadette McKenna, the principal at Chewton, has only just started there as principal, and she was absolutely over the moon with the information I gave her about her budget funding. She was absolutely thrilled.

Just building on that education theme, I want to mention something that I am really proud of and really excited about, and that is the $1.6 billion in transformational funding support for students with disabilities in our schools. This really will be a game changer for those kids—life changing in fact for those many students, particularly those who we know have missed out on that disability support because they have just fallen through the gaps or been ineligible. This is targeted support, particularly for kids with ASD, dyslexia and complex behaviours. The focus of this is not on what the child cannot do but on what they can be, and I think that is a really important measure of this funding. It includes $102.8 million for new resources and support to build the skills and knowledge of staff in our schools so that we can continue to deliver inclusive education like never before. This is really important because we know that the support the students get in those schools is dependent on the knowledge and the skills of the teachers who are there to look after them and teach them.

The other really important funding I was really pleased about was the autism education strategy. There is $19 million to meet the needs and aspirations of autistic students with the Diverse Learners Hub, increased professional development, mentoring for ASD students through the I Can School program and resources to prevent bullying. This is really pleasing because it is delivering on this government’s commitment to develop an education strategy for autistic students and it comes from the recommendations from the 2017 parliamentary inquiry into services for people with autism spectrum disorder, a committee that I was absolutely proud to chair. I notice the member for South-West Coast is here, who was also on the committee. She would understand the importance of that funding for those students with autism.

There is also funding for our wonderful Dja Dja Wurrung traditional owners in Bendigo for a multipurpose cultural hub. This will allow them to have space for other businesses and for public events incorporating existing local community use of basketball and oval facilities and a cultural and arts event space, bringing more and more people to our region to explore and enjoy everything that our Dja Dja Wurrung community can offer.

One announcement that I was really pleased to talk about this morning in my statement was the $6 million for the Castlemaine Goods Shed. The member for Warrandyte said there was no money for Creative Victoria, which I find extraordinary, but the $6 million for the Castlemaine Goods Shed is for the Castlemaine State Festival. They have been leasing the Castlemaine Goods Shed from VicTrack since 2016 and have already been able to convert half of that space into their administration building. Now they have $6 million to extend the renovation within the beautiful old historic goods shed facility for additional arts and entertainment. So there will be breakout spaces for the creative industries within that building, but also it will be a community hub for our creative industries.

Everybody knows that Castlemaine is the centre of creative Victoria, and we look forward to the Castlemaine State Festival kicking off again in March of next year—perhaps in a format a little different to what we have seen in the past as a consequence of COVID, but it will be going ahead and it will be bigger and better than ever before.

One of the other projects that has been funded in my electorate that I am really excited about is $2.5 million towards the Golden Square CFA. The Golden Square CFA building is over 100 years old and in fact it is probably one of, if not the, oldest operating fire station in Victoria. It is a beautiful old building, a very historic building, but it is way past its use-by date for a modern CFA. So that
$2.5 million will go towards finding land for a new station, which is happening right now. Everybody is on board trying to find a location for the new Golden Square CFA station to be built.

And just on that note can I thank all of the volunteers across my electorate in the CFA, in the SES and in all the other areas where I know volunteering has become really important over the last few months—especially our CFA as we head into our summer period. I know that they will be looking after and protecting our communities just as they have always done.

There is funding in the budget for the community use of vacant rail buildings. I have talked about the Castlemaine Goods Shed, which is also a vacant rail building but which came under a different program. So a number of communities across Victoria will receive funding through that program, two in my electorate—one at Newstead and one at Harcourt. The Newstead goods shed will be leased by the Bendigo Maldon bank and operated by Newstead Art Salon Incorporated as a community arts workshop and activity space. They already have the train station, and now they will expand out into the goods shed as well. And the beautiful Harcourt train station will be leased by the Mount Alexander shire and used by the Harcourt Progress Association as a multipurpose community hub. So these are very exciting projects about to convince across Bendigo West.

There are so many things in this budget to talk about—record investment in education, record investment in health and mental health and record investment in community support. It is great to see the minister here at the table. I think the community sports infrastructure stimulus program has about $110 million behind it. That is a huge investment in community sport, and there are many, many sporting organisations across Victoria who we know have done it tough over the last few months. This will actually give the impetus for those sporting bodies to come back bigger, better and stronger.

There is additional funding in the budget to create jobs, and I know there have been other members who have commented on this, but I think the reality is it is about jobs and it is also about our Big Build in social housing—$5.3 billion, and $85 million of that will be allocated at a minimum to the Greater Bendigo area. I am looking forward to working with the minister’s office and our local councils in Bendigo, Castlemaine and the Mount Alexander shire to ensure that social housing is front and centre for us and that we are ready for when this fund is distributed.

I am very, very thrilled that next year our kindergartens will be free for four-year-olds. This is a huge investment: $170 million. It is about making sure that everyone, whether they be a man, a woman, a child, a family, an older person or a younger person, is supported through this budget. It is absolutely vital that everyone across the community has access to great outcomes. That is what this budget is about: jobs, health, education and protecting and making sure our communities are safe into the future. We know there is still a long way to go with COVID-19 until there is a vaccine. But I am confident that our communities are very resilient, very strong and very determined and also very optimistic about the future and looking forward to 2021.

Mr ROWSWELL: (Sandringham) (17:46): I am delighted to take note of the Victorian budget, and in doing so I note that the Victorian Labor government’s budget is big on taxes and is big on borrowing, but in my view it is weak on hope.

Members interjecting.

Mr ROWSWELL: It is weak on hope, and that is what our community needs at the moment. Our community needs hope. It needs hope for a better and brighter future, but what we have got is not hope from this Labor government. No, we have got big borrowing, big taxing, but we are weak on hope and, further, weak on jobs. Labor members opposite will crow.

Ms Addison interjected.

Mr ROWSWELL: They will. They will absolutely crow about this budget being all about jobs, but the reality is quite different. As a result of this budget, as a result of decisions made by this
government, or decisions not made by this government, one in five of our fellow Victorians is either unemployed or underemployed—one in five.

I am not a Johnny-come-lately to the party when it comes to talking about the importance of work. I refer those in the chamber this evening to my maiden speech, my first contribution, where I spoke about my own experience growing up in the suburbs of Beaumaris, Black Rock, Sandringham, Mentone and Cheltenham, where I learned the freedom that comes with having a job. I said in that first speech:

... the opportunity to pay for my first car and overseas trip with the savings that I worked hard for. At an early age we understood the dignity of work and the opportunities that employment provides.

I said:

The dignity of work is something that is often spoken about in an abstract way, but for those who truly know its value having a job is life-changing.

So when I say that this budget is big on taxes and big on borrowing but weak on hope and weak on jobs, that is precisely what I mean. We on this side of the chamber, the Liberal-Nationals, wanted this budget to aspire for more, to aspire for greatness, but it fell so, so short of that.

As recently as 7 December when the numbers were released on the commonwealth government’s labour market information portal it showed that job advertisements in Victoria have risen by a mere 4.5 per cent in the last 12 months, but the overall increase in Australia has been 11.2 per cent. So when I say that this budget is, again, big on taxes and big on borrowing but weak on hope and weak on jobs, there is another case in point.

In my first speech I also at that point proposed that Victoria should consider a debt ceiling and said that that was something that would be an economically responsible thing to do. I said in that first speech:

That is why we must have a debt ceiling in Victoria to avoid ripping off future generations. The Parliament—

I suggested—

should set a limit on Victoria’s net debt of no more than 6 per cent of gross state product.

No more than 6 per cent of GSP. Well, haven’t things moved on from there? Haven’t they? This is before the last budget. In the time up until the last budget the Andrews Labor government had borrowed some $49.5 billion, increasing our debt to GSP ratio from a mere 6 per cent, which was what I was advocating in my first speech contribution, to 12 per cent.

**Ms Britnell:** They doubled it.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** They doubled it. As my friend and colleague the member for South-West Coast points out, they doubled it in that time—in the first two years. This is pre COVID.

**Ms Britnell:** It’s worse.

**Mr ROWSWELL:** But it is worse than that now. The debt to GSP ratio is something closer to 30 per cent now. It seems like a pipe dream, doesn’t it? It seems like a pipe dream to think that way back then, when I delivered my first speech in this place—not that long ago—the aspiration at that point was to have a debt to GSP ratio of 6 per cent. My goodness. I then went on to say:

This would help to preserve the state’s AAA credit rating—

it would help to preserve the state’s AAA credit rating—

and ensure that intergenerational theft is significantly restrained.

I said then, and I say again today:

It is just not right to say that we pay some and our kids pay some.
And that is a quote from the Treasurer. That is reckless, I said, and I say again today: that is reckless, an irresponsible attitude and an arrogant attitude.

We must not be reckless with our spending. We must not mortgage my daughter’s and her children’s future. If there is no parliamentary oversight, governments will continue to spend taxpayer money as if there were no consequences for doing so.

And look at where we are at now.

As part of my role as the state member for Sandringham, a role that I am deeply privileged to occupy, to be the custodian of, I on behalf of my community, on behalf of our community, sent to the Treasurer a budget submission seeking to represent the needs of my community. In that budget submission, which to this point as of yesterday I have not received response to—funny that—I requested a number of things, including $2 million for the construction of a school hall at Beaumaris North Primary School. I acknowledge principal Sherril Duffy, an institution of the Beaumaris community and the Beaumaris North Primary School community, for her strong advocacy in seeking that outcome for her school and her school community. I asked for $1 million for the redevelopment of the Black Rock Primary School sports oval, and I acknowledge Mr Sam Tyndall, the principal of Black Rock Primary School, for his strong advocacy on behalf of his community for that outcome as well. I requested the stage 2 redevelopment of Sandringham College, and I acknowledge principal Amy Porter and the president of the school council, Mr Andrew Barlow, for their strong advocacy on behalf of their community for that outcome. I requested $7.5 million stage 1 funding for urgent maintenance and the development and implementation of a rebuild master plan at Mentone Girls Secondary College, and I acknowledge principal Linda Brown and president of the school council Rachael Angus for their strong advocacy in seeking that outcome as well.

Now, for a government that says—that claims—we are the Education State, for a government that claims that, sadly, in my community at least, they really need to put their money where their mouth is. They really do, because those requests—$2 million for Beaumaris North Primary, $1 million at Black Rock Primary, second-stage funding at Sandy Secondary and $7.5 million at Mentone—did not come through, were not delivered on. I mean, you may as well put in gold-plated doorhandles at Bentleigh Secondary College the way that the Labor member for Bentleigh has been advocating for his school. You may as well be replacing the taps with bronze fittings or something a little bit more elaborate at Mordialloc secondary college, thanks to the advocacy of the member for Mordialloc—another Labor-held seat. But in my seat, what do we get? Time and time again the government claims that they are governing for all. My community is sick of it. They are truly sick of it because they can see firsthand from all the things that this government does not deliver for my community that they are not delivering for all. They are not delivering for all, and that claim is just simply false.

I requested $1 million for the restoration and ongoing maintenance of Hampton Pier—I acknowledge Graham White and John Barton for their advocacy; $50 000 for the beautification of Department of Transport traffic light boxes across the Sandringham district—I acknowledge Les Rausz of the Sandy Street Art Project, Geoff Bransbury of Graffiti Busters and Derek Jones of the Friends of Bayside Roads; $200 000 for the construction of female change room facilities at Trevor Barker Oval; the preservation of the vast majority of the former Gas and Fuel land on Nepean Highway, Highett, for community use—I will come back to that one; and $10 million towards the staged development of a multi-hectare regional sporting precinct within the Kingston green wedge.

Just on the Gas and Fuel land, 6.3 hectares of land, at a time when sporting groups and community groups are coming to me—by the way, just as a matter of fact, we are not making more land in my patch, in my community. We are not making more land. In fact there is less of it, but at the same time the population is increasing, at the same time the needs of my sporting communities and sporting clubs are greater. This is not an issue that is just affecting Sandringham; it affects a lot of areas. There are 6.3 hectares of state-owned land, prime land, former Gas and Fuel land on Nepean Highway, Highett. What does this government want to do with it? They want to sell it. They want to develop it. They want to put towers on it eight or nine storeys high. But the saving grace, they say, is the 11 per cent
open space they are allowing—11 per cent of 6.3 hectares is the open space, open space that includes nature strips. There is no place to kick a footy, no place for passive recreation, a barbecue or something. No, no. This is what they want to do in my community. They say they govern for all but they do not.

I requested additional funding for the upgrade of Sandringham Hospital, specifically the outpatient clinic there. In the road safety space, I asked for half a million dollars for the installation of a pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Childers Street and Warrigal Road, Mentone. I take my hat off—metaphorically of course; I would not wear a hat inside, especially in this place—to crossing supervisor Denise Davis and Mentone Primary School deputy principal Ken Bergen for their strong advocacy in relation to that pedestrian crossing facility. Denise is a saint. She is a warrior and she is a saint. She risks her own life every morning and every afternoon at that crossing. I know, I have seen her do it. I have visited there a couple of times and I have observed it with my own eyes. She risks her own life at a very, very dangerous strip of road to protect the lives of the kids that cross at that crossing. When she is not doing that, she is caring for her aged and infirm husband. She deserves better. Those kids deserve better, and that is why I made that request.

Going on, I also requested the removal of the Warrigal Road level crossing in Mentone to be replaced by a rail underpass, and the removal of the Highecht Road and Wickham Road level crossings in Highecht to be replaced by a rail underpass. I requested more frequent bus services to and from Sandringham station, including bus routes 822, 600, 922 and 923. I requested the approval for the federal government’s fully funded construction of commuter car parking at Sandringham station to go ahead. I also requested on behalf of secondary schools in my area and principals who have advocated for this an additional protective services officer presence at Mentone railway station from 3.00 pm until 6.00 pm, in addition to the regular PSO shift that usually commences at 6.00 pm. I requested these things on behalf of my community because they are desperately needed. I did not put these together in a Sandringham district budget submission to the Treasurer because it was some sort of hope, wish, prayer, folly. No. Members of my community—hardworking members of my community; good, generous, giving members of my community—have come to me requesting them, and it is my job, it is my duty, to advocate for them.

But what we see from this government is an addiction to debt. It is an addiction to spending, and spending in all the wrong places. Just imagine for one moment. There are no issues with borrowing on this side of the house. There are no issues with borrowing whatsoever, especially in this climate. But we should be borrowing to build. We should be borrowing to build, not borrowing to waste. Imagine what could be done in my community if this government were not so addicted to waste?

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (18:01): Well, hope and folly is right, and perhaps folly might be the operative word. The member for Sandringham has taken us on a weird and wonderful journey through the funding priorities of his part of the world, which of course all happens in the magic pudding, where you somehow preserve the AAA credit rating and spend God knows how many millions of dollars on a bunch of fanciful nonsense down in his part of the world. Isn’t that terrific?

Mr Rowswell: Fanciful nonsense?

Mr FOWLES: Yes, that is right—folly indeed. When I ran to serve the people of Burwood I campaigned on a platform of fairness and decency, and I made a particular point of emphasising housing as a key issue. As recently as Monday of this week I had a now-constituent remind me of a conversation during the 2018 campaign when I said that the solution to homelessness was to provide homes, and it was an important enough issue that I devoted a quarter of my inaugural speech to it. In that speech I said that I did not accept that a city and a state and a nation as wealthy as ours should have such high levels of homelessness and housing stress. I drew attention to the knock-on effects of this social malaise in health services, the justice system, mental health, family violence and drug abuse. I said then, and I still believe, that with housing in place the delivery of social services, counselling, psychological support, financial support, employment support, health services, everything becomes so much easier. Without it, however, the mission is almost impossible.
People in a daily scrap for survival have no capacity to address the underlying health problems, to obtain secure employment or to continue their education, and the cycle of disadvantage will just continue until our social compact breaks and our democracy itself begins to fray. When I called, as I did then, for a significant investment in social housing, I was up-front about it. I noted that Labor’s housing policy at that election in 2018 was not particularly ambitious.

Well, no such criticism can be made any more. With this budget we have completely put to the sword that sentiment, because with this budget—and I take note of it in this motion—we deliver not the zero homes that the Liberal and National parties committed to in 2018, or even the 1000 homes that Labor committed to in the 2019–20 state budget. It is a point of ongoing confusion with this budget, 2020–21, isn’t it, because the ‘20’ repeats, but in this state budget, the budget for this financial year, we have committed $5.3 billion to create 12,000 new homes—12,000 new homes. It is an extraordinary commitment. That is 12,000 families whose lives will change as a direct result of this unprecedented investment.

I am immeasurably proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government that is delivering on this bold vision and transforming lives. I am immeasurably proud of the Minister for Housing and my longstanding friend, the member for Richmond, for securing such an incredible outcome for those living in housing stress and for those who are homeless. The scale of this is just enormous. It is Australia’s largest ever investment into social and community housing, and that is not just by our state government; that is even by a federal government. The last time a federal government had a really big crack at this was the Chifley government, can you believe. And this outweighs their substantial commitment to social housing. It is a massive boost for the sector. It is a massively uplifting and transformative piece of policy, and importantly it will deliver a massive boost to our economy—10,000 jobs created each year for four years. Importantly it is coming to Burwood, my electorate, including good-sized chunks of the priority areas of Whitehorse and Boroondara.

This is so much more than a record-breaking investment. In this state budget, like all budgets, we have outlined what we intend to spend. But what the budget does not show is how the flow-on effects of these investments—and they are not just spends; they are genuine investments—will actually help our state’s economy and help, ultimately, the government’s budget position in the longer term. That is what makes this social housing investment so significant. It is going to change the lives of thousands, and it is a project that will not just deliver houses, it will deliver homes. With that it delivers a new-found stability for people from all walks of life. That stability and that freedom is powerful. With it we can better tackle mental health, we can give safety to those once living in fear of violence and give a home to those who did not know where they were going to be sleeping tonight.

Unprecedented numbers and scale aside, this initiative changes the lives of real people—mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, Victorians from a vast range of walks of life. It is a genuine game changer. Our success as a government I think has been measured against the improvements we make for people. That is why this budget was described as a budget that puts people first. We are investing in their health, their wellbeing and their futures.

While this commitment is unprecedented, it is the impacts on our society that are the highlight of it. It is both a fresh start for residents and a release of pressure from other areas of our society, with the cost avoidance—the significant cost avoidance—in areas like justice, mental health, physical health, education and training, job-seeking support and even in fact the economic benefit of labour force mobility. It is not a huge benefit that we have spoken about much in this place but a benefit that is absolutely quantifiable and a benefit that ultimately delivers economic efficiency. You do not often hear people talking about social housing improving economic efficiency. Well, it does, because it allows you to put the housing in the places where it is needed—not just where those future residents of those homes live and want to live but in fact where we need the workers to help build the recovery in Victoria.
It creates jobs right away, and as government investment goes in a time of economic recovery, this announcement, which I have focused now half of my speech on—this take-note motion—ticks all the boxes. It is labour intensive. What does that mean? It means it creates jobs. It delivers a significant uplift in people’s quality of life. It is in accordance with Labor values. It improves outcomes for the most vulnerable in justice and health and education and training, as I have said, and it grows the economy. We know that economic growth has never been more important, for we face an unprecedented set of circumstances. This year—this year like no other—has required a budget like no other.

The Andrews government has a history of strong financial management that has set us up for economic success. Let us just look back to the economic success story that has been able to support Victorians through a once-in-a-century global health and economic crisis, because it is the set-up work and the work of building a strong and resilient economy that has meant we have been able to support Victorians to unprecedented levels in this budget. Victoria has of course contributed almost a third of the nation’s economic growth since 2015. We have created more jobs than any other state or territory. That is half a million jobs created right up until the point when the global pandemic hit, and it hit economies and government budgets all over the globe. We have the biggest infrastructure pipeline in the history of the state. These numbers are boggling: 165 000 jobs since 2014. More than $130 billion of state capital projects are commencing or are underway—$130 billion. When the pandemic hit, consumer and business confidence fell, but we kept people safe by making businesses close their doors and workers stay at home. That has a consequence; of course it does. Gross state product is forecast to contract by 4 per cent in 2021. Total revenue is down—government revenue, that is—4 odd per cent from pre-pandemic levels. State tax revenue has fallen 11 per cent, and we are projecting an overall deficit in this budget of $23 billion this year—but that will reduce by three-quarters in three years to $5.9 billion.

In ordinary times that would be a set of numbers that would be a cause of concern undoubtedly, but this is not the time to deliver a surplus. In fact it would be economically irresponsible to deliver a surplus, because if we were to chase the revenue numbers down by cutting costs using those classic austerity measures we would only exacerbate the economic downturn that Victoria is suffering. Instead we are using the state budget to prop up the household budget. And why? Because the state budget is so underleveraged. The state balance sheet is in such rudely good health as the result of the sound economic management of this government that we are in a position to be able to do that. We are using that strong financial position to protect Victorians, support them through the pandemic and get them back to work. If we compare that with the contribution earlier of the member for Sandringham, who would slavishly have us subvert the state budget—and with it household budgets—to the retention of a AAA rating, like all the contributions around this issue it is inevitably accompanied by a veritable laundry list of sought-after funding commitments that would, were they to be replicated across 88 seats, smash the budget to pieces. Let us be really clear: you have to manage the budget to a set of statewide objectives and you have to put in place the right programs, the right spending priorities, to deliver an economic recovery in a very challenging set of circumstances. That is exactly what the Treasurer has done. That is exactly what this government has done.

But budgets are not just about the economy or the big numbers. Most especially Labor budgets are not just about those things. When we were elected in 2014 we promised to put people first, and as we begin this recovery that is exactly what we are doing. Not only are we building back our vibrant economy, we are delivering strong social outcomes that strengthen our society—and that of course starts locally. In Burwood the rubber hits the road where the decisions of our government make a real impact in my community. This budget has included $9.742 million for Ashwood High School for a new senior school STEM and research centre, a new entrance for High Street Road and improved access to the Waverley District Netball Association netball courts—a great example of where community advocacy and the needs of the school lined up beautifully. We were able to create a situation where we can improve access to that facility, which in turn gets cars off local streets and stops the Saturday morning crush. I know, Acting Speaker Ward, as a netball tragic, if I can say that, that you will know the importance of this sport to the 1200 mainly girls each Saturday morning who
are playing there. The ability of their parents to get in and out of the joint pretty efficiently matters, and it matters a lot. To get all those cars off the local streets using a beautifully resolved entrance and car park is a very, very good thing indeed.

Burwood East Primary got an $8.03 million upgrade, which was terrific to see. Wattle Park Primary, in a commitment that had been germinating since right back at the election, got $661 000 for new relocatable classrooms for its LOTE, languages other than English, program as well as a space that will be used for mental health and wellbeing programs. Even with kids back at school we know that the balancing act that many families have to engage in is not easy, and that is why in this budget we are making kinder free in 2021 and delivering outside school hours care at up to 400 extra schools. That saves parents money. It gives them greater flexibility when it comes to work and care. It allows particularly women to re-enter the workforce and help build this great Victorian recovery that is already underway. As many as 1500 families in Burwood stand to benefit from this critical early learning initiative.

And the Suburban Rail Loop is coming to Burwood. We have allocated $2.2 billion in this budget to stage 1 of the project, connecting Box Hill to Cheltenham—we might be able to get some flowerboxes down there too—running through the electorate with a brand new underground station right in the heart of Burwood. It will create 20 000 jobs. It sets up the recovery, and it is us getting on with the job. We are investing in open spaces, and Wattle Park, again in the heart of my electorate, will share in a new $52 million package that will improve facilities and amenities in parks right across the state.

Importantly, we are investing in community health. The $870 million vastly increases the amount of money available for mental health and reflects the interim recommendations of the royal commission. That is a huge investment—a huge investment—on an issue that is very, very important to my constituents and to me.

I am proud to have delivered for my community as part of this budget and proud to be part of a government that has delivered such an extraordinary investment in public and social housing. I am proud to be part of a government that has delivered an historic budget in the most challenging of circumstances—a twin set of circumstances, a pandemic and a recession. I thank the Treasurer and his team for all of their hard work in difficult circumstances on this outstanding budget. It is a marquee budget, a budget that reflects the extraordinary times in which we live, a budget that puts to work a very healthy state balance sheet and grows opportunity for Victorians at every step as we build the Victorian recovery.

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (18:16): I rise to make a contribution on the take-note motion on the 2020–21 state budget. This budget is unprecedented, and it is unprecedentedly bad. In a time of economic crisis it is a budget where billions and billions are going to waste. Billions of dollars of expenditure are going out the door, but Victorians have no idea where their money is going or how much the Labor government’s financial incompetence is going to cost them. As with all magic tricks, they are just illusions to mask reality, and that is exactly what this budget is—a cheap trick perpetrated on Victorians, designed to disguise the financial ruin this government is wreaking on our great state that we are not seeing in any other state around Australia. More than $90 billion is being spent in this budget, yet this Labor government has outrageously refused for the first time ever to publish a budget paper which discloses its expenditure on the state capital program. You have got to wonder: what is it about the major transport infrastructure projects of this Labor government that they want to hide?

This Labor government refuses to tell Victorians where it is spending their money. This Labor government engages in the politics of deceit and cover-ups. Labor will not be transparent with Victorians about their spending on major projects because the truth is too damning. It is a fact that every single major project overseen by this government has blown its budget by hundreds of millions of dollars and is years behind schedule, and the government would rather cover up its failures than be fair dinkum with Victorians. This budget is forecast to deliver Victorians a staggering $23.3 billion of
deficit in a single year alone—$23 billion this government does not have. This is on top of the $6.5 billion deficit this government delivered in the 2019–20 financial year.

There are some in the government that seek to lay blame on the pandemic for this fiscal devastation, but that is just an attempt to rewrite history—something that Labor has become very accustomed to doing and is expert at. In February this year, before the pandemic, the Treasurer was on 3AW telling Victorians that he needed to cut $4 billion out of government spending because he had lost control of the budget. The Treasurer said, and these are his exact words, which I am sure those on the Labor government benches will remember:

I’m looking at every line item of expenditure and I’m looking to take something like $4 billion out of government expenditure going forward.

Those were his exact words. He knew in February the budget was in dire straits and spending was out of control—before the pandemic. The government tries to blame the pandemic, but it was this government that gave Victoria its second wave of the COVID outbreak with its catastrophic hotel quarantine program.

But that is not the worst of it. This budget is nothing but a sea of deficits. As the budget papers say themselves, deficits are forecast over the forward estimates, with a cash operating deficit of $21.8 billion forecast for the next financial year—and that is simply extraordinary. At the rate of forecast spending by this government, with deficits forecast year after year, Victoria is projected to have a net debt of nearly $155 billion in 2023–24. This is Labor’s legacy—nearly $155 billion of debt that the Premier and Treasurer, unashamedly and sadly, have no plan to pay back. There is a curious section in the budget papers titled ‘Debt management strategy’. This is what the strategy is:

Borrowings will continue to grow until there is an alignment of revenues with expenses.

This is how Labor manage debt. They just borrow and borrow more. When I asked the Treasurer in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week when this alignment would happen, he could not answer. This is the plan. Labor will just continue to borrow and borrow more to fund their reckless spending and their budget blowouts on every one of their city-centric major projects, without any care as to how the money is going to be paid back. So 4.5 per cent of revenue will be spent on interest repayments alone, a figure not seen since the days of the Cain-Kirner governments of the early 1990s.

For my community in the Evelyn electorate, across the Lilydale and Yarra Valley districts, there is nothing. Apart from attempting to reannounce some overdue funding for school upgrades from a past budget, which they were embarrassed to do at the last state election, there is not one single new measure of expenditure or investment for the local community that I represent in this budget. In a record spending budget that will send Victoria’s state debt to an unprecedented $155 billion there is not one new cent allocated for the Lilydale and Yarra Valley districts, proving that the Premier and Labor do not govern for all. It is a slap in the face for residents and communities in my local electorate that there is nothing new and not one spending measure by the Andrews Labor government to generate jobs in my local community or to support desperately needed local infrastructure projects and services.

Together with the local community, I have been really, really determined to campaign alongside them for funding to upgrade dangerous Yarra Valley roads, to upgrade local public transport infrastructure that has been left behind and overlooked and to upgrade local primary school facilities—

Mr Taylor: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, just on factualness, the member said not a single cent; there are the revitalisation boards—$2 million in Lilydale. If you are not going to state facts and say that the government is not investing anything, maybe it would be good to read up on some of the things that are happening in Lilydale.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! It is not a point of order.

Ms VALLENCE: I think that just demonstrates how worried the government are that they are not governing for all. But the Labor government has refused to listen to what local communities and what
my local community want, and it is instead spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars for city projects, like spending hundreds of millions of dollars on the privately owned Marvel Stadium in Melbourne or billions on the Suburban Rail Loop in the inner-city suburbs, which is likely to cost $150 billion and will be lucky to be built by 2050.

While in previous budgets our community has had some hard-fought wins to get a new fire station in Coldstream and facility upgrades at the Yarra Ranges Special Developmental School, which is dear to my heart, the 2020–21 budget massively fails our community, with not one new project and not one dollar. No new funding to fix dangerous roads in the Yarra Valley. No funding to increase car parking at the Lilydale train station or to duplicate the rail tracks between Mooroolbark and Lilydale. No funding to fix a dangerous and inadequate rail bridge at Hull Road in Mooroolbark. No funding for the Yarra Valley equestrian project, infrastructure that would really boost our local economy and support funding for getting more women in sport. No funding for any primary schools in the Evelyn electorate. Nothing new for Seville Primary School, Manchester Primary School in Mooroolbark or Birmingham Primary School in Mount Evelyn, and the list goes on. No funding or a recovery plan for Yarra Valley tourism after businesses and jobs in this sector have been decimated this year. It is nothing but a kick in the guts for people and communities in the Lilydale and Yarra Valley districts after one of the worst years ever. After the Andrews Labor government locked up the Yarra Valley as part of metropolitan Melbourne the Premier now treats us as neither metro nor regional when it comes to funding and has either deliberately ignored or forgotten our community in this budget.

This government is currently sitting on more than $20 million in commonwealth funding to upgrade the Maroondah Highway and install traffic lights in Coldstream but stubbornly refuses to make any investment in road safety in our region and has stubbornly refused to deal with that project and has put it on the shelf. This government would rather play politics than keep people safe, and it is completely pathetic. It is the same in Seville East, where the government has refused to do anything to improve the safety of the Warburton Highway, where schoolchildren are forced to cross the highway from the bus stops with no protection. Emergency responders, including the police and the CFA, are continually attending serious accidents at this stretch of road, with another two major accidents at this stretch of road just since the Treasurer handed down his budget. It is absolutely astounding that this known dangerous hotspot is not a focus for Labor.

Labor’s cookie-cutter approach to improving sky rail in communities continues to demonstrate just how hopeless they are at planning for the long term. Labor refuses to increase car parking, as I said, at Lilydale train station, which is already at capacity, making commuting a nightmare for local residents. The Lilydale line is one of the worst performing lines on the train network, yet Labor will not take this important opportunity to duplicate the tracks between Mooroolbark and Lilydale, which is a massive cause of train delays and congestion, meaning thousands of commuters miss their connecting bus services to homes out in the Yarra Valley and beyond. There is not even money for the Hull Road bridge intersection, which only provides for a single lane of traffic, creating traffic chaos every morning and afternoon, and should simply be fixed before the Kinley development in Mooroolbark gets much further underway.

Now to some of my portfolio responsibilities. The environment remains one of the key attributes to successfully maintaining a strong and vibrant economy. Sadly, this government has presided over repeated environmental disasters during its time in office. The Labor government, through its regulatory failures and lack of investment, has allowed Victoria to become the nation’s dumping capital, meaning communities and the environment have been put at terrible risk. The northern and western suburbs of Melbourne have seen millions of tonnes of stockpiled waste go up in flames because of this government’s failures in environmental waste management. Fires have resulted in entire communities being evacuated, and the local rivers and creeks are still suffering the effects of waste pollution. The government now plans to tax every single Victorian in order to pay for its failures and environmental disasters, from 1 July next year. In this budget every single Victorian will pay
significantly more than what they pay now to put their bins out, with the bin tax being hiked by more than 60 per cent. This is classic Labor, the way that they make Victorians pay for their failures.

This government has been dragged kicking and screaming to introduce a container deposit scheme—the last state in Australia to do so—and it only did this after the Victorian Liberal-Nationals announced one at the start of the year. Again Labor is playing catch-up on the environment. But for reasons that remain completely inexplicable, Labor will not introduce the scheme for another four years. Victorians will have to wait until 2024 because this government cannot get its act together to finally put a scheme in place that will benefit the environment and local communities—something that every other state in Australia has been able to manage so far.

Climate change remains a massive challenge for all of us and our planet, yet this government has no plan to tackle it. The government keeps telling us we need to achieve zero emissions by 2050 but it still cannot tell us how. There is no plan as to how we will meet the emissions reduction targets in a way that ensures energy security and that Victorians are not again left to pick up the tab. The government really does have to come clean on how we are going to achieve zero net emissions. While emissions have dropped over the nine months due to pandemic lockdowns, they will trend up again very soon, and the government cannot delay any more telling Victorians what steps it intends to take to reduce emissions over time.

Now, young Victorians have suffered disproportionately during the pandemic, suffering more job losses than older workers. Employment for young people aged under 30 declined by 13.7 per cent, meaning more than 130 000 young Victorians lost their jobs, in the March to September quarter 2020. The unemployment rate for young workers under the age of 30 rose by 2.3 per cent to a staggering 12.1 per cent. This is much higher than the unemployment rate, at 4.9 per cent, for older workers. And as with women, young Victorians were more likely to work in the hardest-hit industries—arts, recreation, accommodation and food services. For arts and recreation the figure was 43 per cent in 2019, and 63 per cent in accommodation and food services for workers under 30 in 2019. These impacts present long-term risks as early career experiences of young employment risks long-term impacts to participation, employment and future earnings. Yet this government is doing very little to assist the youth in our community. The budget papers reveal the government has only allocated $10 million to just six youth groups to assist with their engagement. But there is nothing in this budget, and there was no engagement with the amazing youth group in my electorate—Bridge Builders Youth Organisation in Lilydale. Not only is this funding extremely limited in its scope and purpose, there is not one cent of funding for any youth groups in the forward estimates. And these community organisations cannot do anything substantial when their funding is about to run out in six months.

This budget is devoid of accountability, transparency and fairness. It is a budget that will leave Victorians drowning in billions of dollars of debt and hardly scratches the surface in terms of repairing the economic damage and ruin it has done to this state.

Mr BRAYNE (Nepean) (18:31): I also rise to speak and add some comments on the Victorian budget 2020–21 but in particular obviously relate it back to my electorate of Nepean—how this budget benefits and supports our community down there and how it works towards a recovery that will benefit all residents of the Mornington Peninsula.

I have been a local on the Mornington Peninsula my entire life. I have always lived, breathed and loved my community. I was primarily raised in Bittern and subsequently Balmarring. I have only extremely fond memories of both. I remember locations like the old Bittern General Store, the Crib Point Milk Bar and the Balmarring video shop, which was also a cafe—one of those video shop cafe places that do not exist anymore. Living in these communities meant when you walked past someone you said, ‘Hi’. When you walked down the street you might see any number of wildlife. It is a real community on the Mornington Peninsula.
But despite the incredible place that the peninsula is to grow up in, live, raise a family and retire to—there are a few retirees on the Mornington Peninsula—the peninsula does have issues it needs to focus on. When I stood at the 2018 Victorian state election, I stood because I wanted to ensure that when these annual budgets got handed down the Mornington Peninsula got its fair share of the budget—that when these budgets got handed down, someone was at the table making the case for the Mornington Peninsula’s issues, many of which have been extremely longstanding and many of which I have personally known all too well to be issues, having been faced with them for many years of my life.

One of these issues is the bus network on the Mornington Peninsula. Growing up, getting places was tough and quite long. I caught the public buses every day to and from high school. My high school decided for some reason not to offer a school bus to where I lived or even to the Hastings area or the Western Port area. They just did not have a dedicated school bus to that area. So I, along with all the other Flinders Christian Community College students, had to catch the public bus. I still remember asking for a 2-hour concession Metcard, which was about $1.40 back then. I also remember the public being typically annoyed when the bus pulled into the bus stop outside the school at the end of the day and we would all haul on. When I was old enough to travel to my friends’ houses by myself, it meant that catching the buses became more than just a school trip. Most of my friends lived in Rosebud or Mornington, meaning to get there I would need to catch the bus from Balnarring to Frankston and then back down to Rosebud. This meant trips of sometimes 2 hours, 2½ hours or 3 hours, including of course the long waits for the bus, both at the start and interchanging, and the sporadic times at which the buses arrived. The long durations of all these obviously made the bus experience less than impressive.

At the 2010 Victorian state election the Liberals promised to improve the bus system on the peninsula. Though I still could not vote, I obviously followed the elections closely. I remember getting the Age, which you got for, like, $7 a year if you were in high school and you had a subscription, and I remember feeling kind of hopeful. I was hopeful: ‘Okay, maybe we’ll get some improvements here, because we only have Liberal MPs on the Mornington Peninsula’. I thought, ‘Okay, maybe this will be the chance’. The Liberal Party then won that election. But by the time I finished school and had gone through university, there were still no improvements. I went to university from 2012 to 2015, and for much of those years I caught the bus. I did not get my licence until I was 21 because I wanted to save money from working and I knew a car’s upkeep was obviously tremendously expensive. So I caught the bus every day. It was about an hour into Frankston and then the train from Frankston to Melbourne—long trips, long days.

The point I want to stress to every resident of the southern Mornington Peninsula is that I get it. I know the bus system. I am a product of the Mornington Peninsula’s public transport network, which is why when I was elected in 2018 I thought, ‘Now is my opportunity. I can begin the long process of attempting to change the bus network’. In just my second budget, in my second year since being elected, I can announce to the southern peninsula community and to the Mornington Peninsula bus patrons as a whole that we will be increasing the frequency of route 788, from Frankston to Portsea, to every half an hour on weekdays and around about every 40 to 50 minutes on weekends. This is huge for the community. The 788 runs straight through my electorate, through Dromana, Rosebud, Rye, Tootgarook, Sorrento and Portsea. So much of my electorate will benefit from this, in particular many young people who are reliant on a more regular and reliable bus system to take them to work, to friends or to school and in particular many more senior residents who are reliant on a regular and reliable bus service to take them to friends, family members, community groups, doctors appointments and the like.

Additionally, in a game changer, route 887 will now go from Rosebud through Dromana and then straight onto the Peninsula Link, express to Frankston. Now, I wish this service had been available when I was in my earlier years, but wishing something is not the point; it is time to get it done. I am thrilled we are getting moving on this two years into my term.

Now, I note the member for Mornington’s comments yesterday about the bus improvements not affecting his area. I like the member for Mornington, but this is incorrect. Another notable change is
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the extension of route 781 that would typically end in Mount Martha, in the member for Mornington’s electorate, but will now continue through to Dromana. This is huge. The more opportunities to get to Dromana from Mornington—

Mr Morris: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I actually said it did not benefit the electorate, not that it did not extend through the electorate. It was a very precise choice of words and it was an accurate choice of words. It is of no benefit to the electorate of Mornington.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Richardson): All right, member for Mornington. There is no point of order.

Mr Brayne: I am saying to you that the benefits are for Mornington residents who want to get to Dromana and for Dromana residents who want to get to Mornington. I would say that would certainly be a benefit. I am obviously happy to give the member for Mornington a briefing, to have a chat or to genuinely work with him if he wants to work through the improvements; I will extend that invitation. I also will reach out in the coming weeks to the mayor of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Despi O’Connor, and deputy mayor Sarah Race to discuss the improvements on the Mornington Peninsula and get the council’s perspective. The reality is that this is the biggest improvement in the bus transport network on the Mornington Peninsula in about 30 years. That is the reality.

This budget makes considerable investment in schools throughout Victoria, including on the Mornington Peninsula. During May I was able to announce to the Rosebud community, as some point of hope for the community, that Rosebud Primary School will be rebuilt. This news spread through the community fast, helped in no small measure by principal Stephen Fisher’s uncontrollable excitement. This rebuild includes a gymnasium, yes, on the exact same location, because one of the key parts about the rebuild is about maximising the land—maximising the space of the land, making some of the classrooms two stories, removing some of the portable buildings that are a long-term fixture of the Rosebud Primary School and making better use of that land for a gymnasium.

Another important point to note is that the gymnasium facility will be open for use by the public. This will ensure that the Southern Peninsula Basketball Association and other local leagues and teams will have a brand new facility to compete in, with access to the gym something the Rosebud community is already very excited about. Plans to name the stadium ‘The Fishbowl’ in reference to principal Fisher are currently on hold, but I know that the local basketball community will be singing the praises of the school and the government rebuild when they hit the courts late next year.

Dromana Primary School is also receiving over $8 million to rebuild large parts of their school—such a great community. The school community in Dromana is extremely passionate, and I know that this money will go a long way to fulfilling the needs of this school. Principal Andrew Haley, new to the school this year, will have a part in setting up this school to be a successful, modern and future-proof school. Principal Haley, along with his school council and the entire school community, now will be the ones to make what this school is for decades. It is a huge task with a lot at stake. There are big decisions being made for this school, and I know the school community is absolutely ready for it. I will be with them every single step of the way. I am fortunate to have gotten to know principal Haley already, and he and I will continue to have regular discussions over the coming months about this.

Rosebud Secondary College is also a beneficiary of this Andrews government budget, with $10 million towards modernising and upgrading facilities—$10.02 million to be exact. This school community has put in the hard yards over the years. When I was elected I was made aware of repeated attempts by Rosebud Secondary and the community to fundraise for a wellness pavilion at the school. This conversation had gone on for years, so I advocated for a substantial government investment, and this project is now starting work thanks to the federal government, the state government, the Bendigo Bank and the Rotary club—a huge community effort. We look forward to that starting.

This year’s $10 million investment will transform the education opportunities for students on the southern peninsula. Investments like these are things that I am proud of, knowing that no matter your
postcode on the Mornington Peninsula, you can get a decent, first-class education in a modern facility. Principal Lisa Holt and deputy principals Geoff Seletto and Glen Powell have brought me into the school community literally from the get-go, and I have been fortunate to have been able to get to know the last two student councils of 2019 and 2020. These young adults have a bright future. It is right and it is time to make these investments into the school community.

This budget takes climate change seriously by further incentivising energy efficiency and the further usage of renewable energy sources. The Solar Homes program is one such example. Nepean has seen a huge uptake of this program, a program that has been expanded further in this budget. Victoria will transform into a renewable energy state with 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030 and net zero by 2050. This is achieved through developments like the Southern Hemisphere’s largest battery storage system, which will be established in Victoria with the partnership between Neoen and Tesla. Neoen will pay for the construction of the battery as well as its ongoing operation and maintenance. Neoen’s willingness to invest in Victoria shows confidence in this state and is an acknowledgment of the clean energy future that is inevitable.

This budget takes housing seriously and the need for social housing. We will invest $6 billion to build 12,000 new social and affordable homes. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it gets money back into the economy and gets our workers back into work. It creates work at a time when the economy and people are hurting. But importantly it gives people hope for a future home. This period of time has hurt so many business owners of course but also pensioners, Victorians with disabilities, domestic violence victims and so many Victorians across the state. Of these 12,000 new dwellings, approximately 1000 will be dedicated to those fleeing family violence and further houses for those suffering from mental illness.

This budget makes investments in our children’s early years by making kinder free next year, saving families hundreds of dollars for their kids enrolled in a participating funded kindergarten program. The investment will not only make sure more kids are getting a great early childhood education but make it easier for parents, particularly women, to return to the workforce as we recover from this pandemic. The kindergarten years are so important for our children. I still have faint memories of my kindergarten years at Balnarring Preschool. I would be curious to know how many members of Parliament here are fortunate enough to represent the area that they went to preschool or kindergarten in. I would be curious to know how many there are. I am very fortunate to have gone to Balnarring Preschool and to now get to represent Balnarring Preschool and the southern Mornington Peninsula in Parliament. I remember as well the important task of having to bring in a piece of fruit each day which would be cut up and shared with everyone at lunchtime. These are important moments in preschool. Under this investment subsidies will be offered to early childhood services providing funded kindergarten programs, meaning free kinder for four-year-olds and eligible three-year-olds attending a participating sessional kinder. Families with children enrolled in kinder programs at a long day care centre will also benefit from the savings. Any families that have kids attending unfunded three-year-old programs in sessional kindergartens will be eligible for the reduced fees.

This budget, coming in after both the bushfire season and the COVID-19 pandemic, is about recovery. It is about building our economy back after an awful year and about setting out our priorities for how we get the economy back after this year. Schools, buses, housing, the environment are all investments that will see our economy begin to come back but additionally make lasting changes for our state, particularly the Mornington Peninsula.

I stand here today as a proud Mornington Peninsula member of Parliament, one who is able to stand up and say to their community that the state budget has delivered for them in many ways. Members of Parliament always say that they have been listening to their electorates since they got elected, but I have been listening to people who make up the peninsula not just since 2018 but for my whole life, and finally I get the chance to advocate for what we need and get on with it for my community.
Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (18:46): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on the appropriation bill 2020. We all know that this year has been like no other and the challenges that we have faced this year are some that governments around the world are still struggling to grapple with. We have only to look to the US, UK and Europe to know that coronavirus is still ravaging countries right across the globe. Last sitting week our government delivered the 2020–21 budget and on that day we finally reached zero active cases, a tremendous achievement that we could not have reached without the hard work and commitment of all Victorians to rid their local communities, street by street and house by house, of this deadly virus.

On this side of the house we have never wavered in our belief that Victorians could do this and we could do it together as one people. Those opposite said that it could not be done, and I go as far as to say that that is probably largely because they fail to see the courage, the determination, the resilience and the actual true grit that makes up the Victorian spirit. Those opposite also said that our targets were unreachable, and over the last two months we have practically reached each and every one of those stops on our government’s road map to recovery. This type of obstructive, pessimistic and short-sighted behaviour is exactly why two years ago Victorians emphatically re-elected and backed in the Andrews Labor government.

But here we are, ready to begin the process of repairing and rebuilding our state to be bigger and better than before. This work requires unprecedented spending and a bold and visionary program that only a Labor government can deliver. Now is not the time for small-target budgets. It is not the time to sacrifice our funding needs on the altar of the budget surplus. For my community, the Tarneit community, and the wider Wyndham community, we need jobs and we need investment and we need them now, not spending cuts. That is why my community is lucky that we have a Labor government which is absolutely committed to delivering this visionary budget. So for the Tarneit community I am pleased to say again that this budget delivers for you and your family.

When it comes to schools in our electorates, this budget continues the hard work that our government has delivered over the last six years. Two years ago Labor committed to building 100 additional schools over the course of this term and the next. For Tarneit this means that three new schools, two of which are up now and running with another to open next year, have been funded and built. This budget lays the foundation for an additional three schools to be built: $147.3 million has been allocated in this budget towards our schools, including purchasing land for new schools. For Tarneit, land is going to be purchased for Riverdale East Primary School in Tarneit’s west, a great community; Tarneit Missen House Primary School in Tarneit’s north, and—this one really excited my community, I have to say, and excited me—Truganina North Secondary College in Truganina. These schools will soon come to the Tarneit electorate, and only an Andrews Labor government will deliver these schools. We are not just building new schools—and this is really important—we are also going to upgrade existing schools. This is really important for thousands of families in our community who live in established areas, like Hoppers Crossing.

Last year I was able to stand here and speak about the incredible announcement for the Grange P–12 College and the $9.5 million they received from our government to upgrade facilities there on the campus. Today I get to stand here and speak about Hoppers Crossing Secondary College. This is the oldest high school in my electorate, and it will receive just over $10 million from this budget to upgrade and modernise the school. I am so proud to be able to say that we are finally going to bring this school’s facilities into the 21st century. Of course this is all on top of the $1.1 billion education package as part of the building works package that our government delivered earlier this year, which also had $11.23 million for Dohertys Creek P–9 College in Truganina, allowing the school to open its doors for years 7 to 9 in 2022. So I am happy to say that when it comes to schools in the Tarneit electorate, when it comes to ensuring kids in the outer west get the education they deserve, this government, our Labor government, has the back of families in the west.

Having spoken to principal Keith Halge and teachers, parents and students of this school community over the last two years, you cannot even begin to imagine the joy and absolute relief that they are
feeling at this announcement. This upgrade has been a long time in the making, certainly a long time before I became the member for Tarneit. I felt very honoured and very privileged to have been able to pick up the phone a couple of weeks ago to Keith, and I am sure he was as close to tears as I was. So to Keith and your team there at Hoppers Crossing, I personally want to thank you and acknowledge all of your advocacy and all of the conversations that you have had with both me and my predecessor on behalf of the school. When I first sat down with you and we did that school tour a couple of years ago, you did not hold back—and you should not have had to. Your determination, your passion and your relentless pursuit—I say it is relentless, and I say it with a smile because it was relentless—of this upgrade for your students and your families in Hoppers is absolutely commendable, and the school community is lucky to have you, Keith.

From that first time I stepped inside the school grounds at this local school it was crystal clear to me what this school needed. I have always believed that no child deserves to be disadvantaged because of their postcode, and I often talk about that in this place. It is really important to say it again and again: no child should be disadvantaged because of their postcode. This is a sentiment and it is a belief that really goes to the heart of Labor and Labor governments. It is who we are, it is what we believe in, it is what we stand for and it is what we deliver for all Victorian children. Stamping out the disadvantage of kids in the outer west means providing them with the best opportunities in life, and we know that we need to provide them with those opportunities early in life. And yes, that means their school years. It means building new schools and it means upgrading the older ones, providing students with first-class facilities for that world-class education they need. Now, when you have got a school full of old musty portables and you have got windows that can no longer be opened, you know an upgrade of the school is well overdue. So to Keith, to your teaching and support staff, to students and their families, I say: 2021 is going to be an awesome year for our community, and I cannot wait to share it with you all.

When it comes to health services, our government is ramping up its investment. Indeed with the onset of this pandemic our health sector has seen the biggest injection of funding in its history, and we are not stopping there. Our government is injecting $200 million into the Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund, which is going to upgrade equipment and improve healthcare services right across Melbourne. In addition, this budget delivers $121 million for our Better at Home initiative, improving and expanding in-home care for 50,000 cancer patients across Victoria. But whether it is chemo or even dialysis or palliative care, we are making sure more Victorians can get the care they need from the comfort and the safety of their own home, from the comfort of their own bed.

For the Wyndham community we can expect further things in this space, with $4.8 million going towards services and capital funding for a future expansion at our very own Werribee Mercy Hospital. It makes me smile when I reflect on Werribee Mercy Hospital because I always think about visiting the hospital—this was just pre COVID—to deliver some of our wonderful baby bundles to the new parents who had just given birth to their first child. There is nothing more I like seeing than the happiness, sheer joy and, I have to say, bewilderment of new mums and dads. Indeed during COVID and lock down I spoke to numerous women there in the delivery room of this hospital—would you believe they called me?—reassuring them of the arrangements we had just put in place for the care of their other children. It is nice to know I can be a great deal of help in the throes of labour, and most certainly I cannot wait to go and meet those families in person in 2021 to see how their families have grown and how they have coped during COVID. Now, Werribee Mercy is the number one health service in our community, and we love that hospital. Our government is committed to ensuring that it can service the needs of our community, and I am positive that this funding means that we can look forward to more funding announcements in the not-too-distant future.

I would certainly be remiss if I did not speak about the fantastic infrastructure announcements that our government has made recently about the airport rail link. Not only will this project create thousands of jobs in Melbourne’s west, but when it is actually finished it will make travelling to the airport so much easier for so many families. It is a long project—it has got a completion date of 2029—which is why we are getting started now on laying the foundation for such a vital part of our future transport network.
Speaking of how transformative our government’s plan is when it comes to rail networks, let us talk for a minute about the fast rail to Geelong. By placing more Geelong services on our Werribee line not only are we creating more jobs, building around 10 kilometres of track between Laverton and Werribee, but for commuters coming out of Tarneit station this is going to be really good news, because freeing up space on the regional rail link means more services running direct from Wyndham Vale to the city and those trains will not be filled up with passengers from Geelong. You might even get a seat there.

I have spoken a lot in the last two years about Tarneit station and the need to improve access to the station, which is why we are already building more car parking spaces at the station and indeed running more bus services. But improved access means nothing if you cannot get onto the train, and with more services being able to run directly from Wyndham Vale you will be able to do just that. That is why our fast rail plan is such a game changer for families right across the Tarneit electorate.

I have talked a little bit about this afternoon the big-ticket items in this budget, but it is important to recognise some of the smaller funding announcements that this budget contains. As part of this budget an additional $50 million will be allocated to the Growing Suburbs Fund, from which Wyndham is eligible to receive grants. I love the Growing Suburbs Fund. I feel like every other week I am cutting a ribbon for important community facilities and services that we have been able to fast-track and open in collaboration with Wyndham City Council. So on top of the $25.2 million funded this year, this is going to top up the fund to $75.2 million. Now, this might not seem a lot when you are talking billions of dollars in the scheme of future rail networks, but for people in Wyndham it helps to pay for our community centres, our parks, our sporting pavilions—important community facilities that all of us like to use. When you consider that Tarneit will also receive $500 000 as part of the Tarneit revitalisation project, there is a lot of opportunity for some small shovel-ready projects to get off the ground and improve our local community.

One thing I am really proud to talk about is our government’s $5.3 billion Big Housing Build, which is going to build an additional 12 000 new homes throughout Victoria. Not only will this create over 10 000 new jobs over the next four years, it is also going to create over 9300 new social housing homes. Now, I have spoken in this chamber previously regarding the need for more social housing. It is something that I and my colleagues in Melbourne’s west have discussed at length. We take the issue of homelessness very, very seriously and have worked together along with some of our federal colleagues to advocate for more social housing to address homelessness. But it is something that unfortunately the Liberal federal government has left wanting. We know that the largest demographic for homelessness in Australia is women over 55 years of age. Instead of helping these women get a roof over their head, they appear to be using them as a scapegoat for an assault on their superannuation.

Our government thinks differently, and with this injection of funding and unprecedented spend on social housing in Victoria we are now going to lead the nation and build these homes that so many Victorians need.

This budget builds on the transformative program that we delivered last year. With the worst of this pandemic hopefully having passed, now is the time to invest in our state and get on with delivering the projects that matter to Victorians. For Tarneit and Wyndham that means getting on with delivering new schools, improving infrastructure and creating local employment opportunities. I am pleased to see that this budget does just that, and I most certainly commend it to the house.

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (19:01): It is a pleasure to rise this evening to make my contribution to the take-note motion that is currently before the house. I think 12 months ago none of us could have possibly imagined the year that Victorians have just been through—indeed the year that we have endured globally. We came out of the summer scarred by some of the worst bushfires that we have seen in history of this state, and we immediately found ourselves confronting a once-in-a-generation public health emergency.
With COVID on our doorstep the need for careful decision-making from all levels of government but also for scrutiny of those decision-makers became absolutely vital. Instead, and in contrast with what occurred in other states around Australia, what we saw from the Premier was unfortunately an effort to avoid all scrutiny and at every opportunity. Sittings of Parliament were curtailed; the cabinet, where ideas should really be debated and tested, was stripped back to just eight people; and the Premier refused to establish any kind of oversight mechanism as had occurred in other states, at a federal level and indeed even in New Zealand, despite the fact that the state was wielding extraordinary state-of-emergency provisions. It was in that climate that the Andrews government made some catastrophic decisions on hotel quarantine and on contract tracing, which are now of course a matter of history in this state and which led to Victoria’s second wave and the lockdown in which we saw 800 people lose their lives and Victorians found themselves yet again isolated for weeks on end.

That is the context for the budget which is now before us. This is the biggest-spending budget Victoria has ever seen, and in what has become a hallmark for this government it is the least transparent. No-one disputes the fact that extraordinary times do call for extraordinary measures and we do need to be absolutely focused on jobs and economic recovery, but the legacy of this budget is one of debt, deficit and ballooning expenditure. Victoria is going to post an operating deficit of $23.3 billion this financial year alone. That is more than every other state that has handed down a budget combined. It is more than the combined deficits of every other state in Australia. Net debt is going to hit $155 billion by 2024, and that is a fact that I have not heard those opposite mention.

I think the key test for me in this budget is how that money is going to be spent. It needs to be managed wisely—in a wise manner—to ensure that people get back into work and to grow the economy, because the reality is this is going to take generations to repay. Once this money is spent there is not going to be much left, and we see that from the fact that the credit rating agencies, particularly Standard & Poor’s, have now downgraded Victoria’s AAA rating. When I look around my own communities, who are in desperate need of infrastructure, I was disappointed to see that they have been largely overlooked in this budget. I say that in the context that if the government cannot find the money to invest in the infrastructure that we so desperately need at a time when it is borrowing so many billions of dollars, then when will Labor ever see our communities as a priority?

The Kilmore bypass is perhaps the best example of that. The member for Eildon, who is at the table, is laughing rather wryly because she had that area of my electorate prior to the last redistribution we had, so she is very well aware of the issues around the bypass. I think the government owes the Kilmore community a massive apology when it comes to the bypass. Before the 2014 election they accused us of misleading the community because the bypass was not yet built. That was despite the fact that the planning had all been done, that we were on track to complete the project by the end of 2018, which was the time frame that we had always set out at the 2010 election, and that the early works had been done. The planning had been done. The project was shovel ready, and today it still is shovel ready.

But here we are six years later—six years later—and it was all confected outrage by Labor before that election. They never had any intention of actually building that project. The fact is that they have billions of dollars in expenditure in this year’s budget. They say they were looking for shovel-ready projects, but they could not even bring themselves to put more than $12 million on the table for that project that Kilmore so desperately needs. Communities to the north of Melbourne are crying out for greater investment in infrastructure. The town is choking, and until the government actually commits to funding that project and building that project, Kilmore is going to continue to suffer serious amenity problems. The traders in the main street are going to continue to suffer. Schoolchildren on their way to school are going to continue to suffer safety risks. It is a major issue for that community, and yet it has not even rated a mention by the current government. They have allocated $12 million to build a roundabout—and that is it, six years later. I have to contrast that with the last two elections, where each time The Nationals in partnership with the Liberals have budgeted to build the bypass.

The Benalla police station is another example. It is the worst police station in the state, and the police association will tell you that. The building was constructed in 1956. It was not built to be a police
station. In fact for many years it housed the department of agriculture in Benalla. It has never been fit for purpose. It does not have female change rooms for female police officers. There are real issues with them being able to separate perpetrators and victims when they are interviewing people. I have spoken in here many times about the need to build a new police station in Benalla. The government has done a very minor patch job on the building—but only after I pointed out that it was riddled with mould, asbestos and cracked walls and had serious occupational health and safety issues. Again, you would think that in a budget where Labor is borrowing $155 billion they might have been able to find the $15 million that is required to give the hardworking men and women of Benalla police an appropriate place to work. Ultimately I think it shows you where the government’s priorities lie. It truly does to me demonstrate that Labor is a party that governs for a few, not for all Victorians.

Some schools I have found have been amazed that they have received funding, and they are busy trying to figure out what the funding is actually for. Meanwhile others, like Seymour and Benalla colleges, again which I have spoken about on umpteen occasions in this place, have been overlooked. Both schools are waiting on additional funding in order to complete a rebuild of their campuses, and it is really disappointing that they too did not receive funding this year.

I am pleased that my advocacy for the Pyalong and Molka CFA brigades has paid off, and those two brigades will receive new CFA sheds, but Strathbogie, Heathcote and Moorilim are also still in need of funding. I think it is going to be no surprise to anybody that CFA volunteers at the moment are quite disheartened with the changes that the government has pushed through over the last couple of years. The least the government could do is to fund the capital works that many of those brigades need in order to keep stumping up year after year, summer after summer, defending lives and defending property.

One thing I did want to touch on was public housing. The government of course is making a quite substantial investment in public housing, but I do want to make the point that significant investment is required not just in the city but also in the north-east, including in Seymour, Shepparton and Benalla. Public housing waiting lists are under intense pressure. It is why we called for additional investment in housing in our Back to Work and Back in Business document, where we put forward constructive suggestions to the government of how they could help address the COVID recovery. But between Seymour, Shepparton and Benalla almost 2650 people are waiting for public housing; 1350 of them require priority access, which means that they are homeless, they are escaping or have escaped family violence, they have a disability or they have significant support needs and special housing needs. That is a complete and utter crisis, and the time that it has taken people in our region to get public housing has blown out quite substantially under Labor. It is difficult to make a direct comparison, because the government—rather cleverly if they wanted to avoid scrutiny—have changed the measures by which public housing waiting lists are measured, but we do know that as of September there were 239 people on the list for priority access in Seymour, another 389 in Benalla and 722 in Shepparton. That really is a crisis for our region, and I would urge the government to make it clear and to tell us how much of the funding that has been allocated in this year’s budget for public housing will actually be spent in regional Victoria and in our region.

What I find really concerning about this budget is that Labor has used the pandemic as a cover and as a justification to borrow huge amounts of money to cover up its cost overruns on major projects. We know that there has been about $25 billion in cost overruns on projects—and they are the ones that we know about. Of course what we found in this year’s budget is that the government decided not to publish the state capital works program, a move that I find to be amazing, to be frank. I think the Premier likes to model himself after LBJ, but quite frankly the move to just eliminate budget papers is far more reminiscent of Donald Trump. It is just quite extraordinary that clearly this government feels that the public do not have the right to know about how their money is being spent or where projects are being delayed or where projects have had major cost overruns and is just making a unilateral decision not to publish key, vital information that Victorians have a right to know. It is really just quite extraordinary, and it goes to the broader tale of this government that it avoids scrutiny and it avoids accountability at all costs. It is quite frankly breathtaking arrogance.
It is a story that is backed by the budget cuts that we have seen to IBAC and the concerns from the Ombudsman that her office has not been adequately resourced as well. But we do know that, for example, the Regional Rail Revival program, which is being funded almost entirely by the federal government—it is just up to the state to roll the program out—is running late, and that was undercosted by the state. We know that the West Gate Tunnel Project is running late. We know that Melbourne Metro has huge cost blowouts. In fact it seems that almost everything the Minister for Transport Infrastructure touches goes pear-shaped. The sad thing is that this budget is basically being used as a cover—COVID is being used as a cover to backfill those huge holes that already existed in major projects, and then by simply refusing to publish the information, the government is relying on the fact that Victorians will never discover that and will never have the opportunity for that to be brought to light.

I do not think anyone is arguing that the extraordinary situation facing us this year does not warrant an extraordinary response. COVID has delivered a body blow to so many businesses and so many people. I think of people like Scott Upston in Benalla, who I have watched over the last five years build a thriving and successful business. He has worked so hard to build a very respected business, a gym in Benalla, Primal Health Club, and he almost lost it all because of the decisions that the government made. I think of people like Carmen Barnsley from Mount Camel, who because of border restrictions was unable to say goodbye to her sister, who suddenly fell ill and passed away during COVID. Hundreds of people contacted me during the lockdown. Many of them were caught in dreadful situations not of their own making but of the government’s. And the government’s message was, ‘We’re all in this together’, but we were not really, because I did not lose my job, the Premier did not lose his job, we did not stop drawing a wage in here like so many thousands of Victorians were forced to do.

So my challenge to those opposite: instead of congratulating yourselves on what a big-spending budget you have, you need to come to grips with the jobs crisis that is facing this state. We have one in five Victorians who are unemployed or underemployed at the moment. Unemployment is going to be higher than the national average for the next four years. Never before have Victorians been driven so far apart.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:16): It is a real privilege and honour to rise and speak on the Victorian budget, the take-note motion for what is a really remarkable budget, a budget for our times and a budget that really is about recovering and bringing back everything that we cherish and love so much in Victoria: hope, aspiration, pride and being the best in our nation. This budget sets us up for the future. If you hear the comments from those opposite, and there will be a few tuning in—I know they will be having their dinner parties out the back tonight, probably selecting the next Liberal leader, lining that up, and we have seen a new shadow come down to the front benches, the Shadow Minister for Finance and other things—you would have to wonder from some of their contributions whether there was a pandemic, whether there was one of the most cataclysmic events that we have seen in our nation’s history and in our state’s history.

It took some brave decisions and it took a courageous budget, a big-spending budget, to get us back on track—a budget for its times. And thank goodness we had had five budgets before that that had set up our state, indeed the engine room of the nation’s economy up until that point, because if we had not had all of those recipes for success, if we had not had hundreds of thousands of jobs created before and if we had not had all of the economic and infrastructure reforms, then we would have been in a far worse state. And thank goodness for the government’s budget; it is a big-spending budget to make sure we can get back on track.

We know in each and every one of our communities the toll that has been taken through the coronavirus pandemic—the job losses, the mental health and wellbeing impact, the lives lost—but it is about how you respond to those challenges and that turmoil and how we get our communities back on track now, and those are the very critical challenges and decisions that we face now. How do we get back to what we love in Victoria? How do we get back to that hope and pride and aspiration? This budget sets us up for the future.
Reflecting back on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which I am a member of, and some of the presentations that were put forward, we know that there will be an 8-plus per cent unemployment rate in Victoria. We know that that will have a longer term impact and trajectory. We were on track in our economy, indeed our jobs creation, and it will take years to get back to that measure, but we cannot get through this with austerity. We cannot get through this crisis by cutting services or by retreating. Now is the time to be spending and investing in the Victorian people and indeed in their future, and I am very excited about the jobs plan that has been announced that looks at a range of different initiatives, but particularly those infrastructure projects around housing for more Victorians—some 12 000-plus homes—and building the Suburban Rail Loop, which starts in my patch out in Cheltenham and the member for Clarinda’s patch and goes all the way through to Werribee, connecting all major train lines. The airport rail link that has been talked about for a long time will finally see the light of day.

These are the big futureproofing projects. And I have heard those opposite talk about basically stepping back from that big infrastructure investment by looking at the Grattan Institute and not doing big builds. Well, I tell you, when my community elected me 2200 days ago—314 weeks ago—and they said to me, ‘Tim, we’re putting our trust in you to change our community like never before’, they did not expect me to sit back and just do more of the same. They wanted me to advocate for them. They wanted me to change our community for the better, to deliver generational change like we have never seen before. It started with level crossing removals on the Frankston train line. The Frankston train line’s major development, the most transformational thing that happened, was when it ran through to Frankston all those years ago. There were 30 level crossings on the Frankston train line between Caulfield and Frankston when we came to government; 18 will go and 12 new stations will be built. The Mordialloc Freeway, such a significant project that was put forward on the map by the Hamer government all those decades ago and that connected major employment precincts in our community, is well underway. That has been part of that journey and investment.

Because we do not want the first-rate education that is provided to our kids by our wonderful teachers and education support staff to be hamstrung by second-class facilities we have seen record investment in our schools. This budget delivers upgrades to Parktone Primary School for their stage 2, and we are starting to deliver the Mentone Park Primary School master plan, with stage 1 getting underway. Of course for the school that those opposite walked away from, Beaumaris Secondary College, nearly $19 million will be invested in stage 2 for that fantastic and state-leading education facility.

Something that I am really passionate about and really proud of in the education space is the investment in our schools and indeed in our people. More teachers will be needed over the coming years as our schools expand, and we are investing more in our wonderful early childhood educators. We need thousands more. There has never been a better time to get into education in our state. Whether you want to be a teacher or you want to be an early childhood education specialist, this is the time to get involved. This is the time to be part of that generational transformation that will set our kids up for the future. In Victoria we do not just think that you should go to school and get an education; we believe education is a human right. We believe every single student deserves the very best outcomes. And it is not just about saying ‘Oh, well, we expect and hope for education for all’; it is about living your values, and that is what a budget allows you to do. It is your opportunity to take away all the superfluous statements and the empty rhetoric and actually deliver and look at what you are doing.

One thing that really tugs at the heartstrings and something I am really proud of was the announcement of the disability inclusion package. This is indeed one of the biggest hallmarks of this budget. It will change the outcomes for students with additional needs. And if you go back to that fundamental principle of every student having the very best outcomes regardless of their circumstance and regardless of their postcode, then this budget delivers in spades. It is making sure that our kids with additional needs get the very best support, doubling the amount of kids that will be supported under the program for students with disabilities and making sure that no student gets left behind. It is so very
important that we live our values in everything that we do and make sure that we are investing in our children’s future.

I am so very proud to see more support for students with autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia. These kids do not suffer from anything other than the fact that we do not cater our education system enough to support them in their education journey. It is just like taking a different pathway in their learning. We have to be on the journey with them; we have to make those differentiations to their learning and their outcomes. That is why this announcement of a disability inclusion package is so very inspiring. It will change lives. We know from our electorate experiences and we know from engaging with our communities that there are parents, guardians, carers and indeed grandparents who have to front up to a school or front up to the education bureaucracy and through no fault of anyone other than a lack of resources and a lack of outcomes they almost have to become campaigners or lobbyists for the outcomes for their kids just to get that extra support and extra funding. Well, this budget and this investment in the disability inclusion package makes sure that we are with them, that we get around them and that we support them. The facilitators that will help with that process will change outcomes, and I am so very proud of the investments that are being made.

A big hallmark of this pandemic will be shown when the time comes in the future that we are reflecting on where we had gone during this pandemic as we are recovering as a state and indeed as a nation. There is one story that will be told. This has been lost on those opposite each and every time, and they make this mistake when they reflect on the education journey in our schools: they say that six months have been wasted in education. There have not been six months wasted in education. That is a huge insult to all our teachers, our education support staff and our specialist educators. It was said by the federal Treasurer. It was said by those opposite at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. It really undermines the wonderful work, the determined work and the outcomes of our teachers who have done everything they possibly can—the countless hours into the middle of the night supporting their students to get through this time. When they write the stories in the future of the efforts made during this pandemic they will talk about the nurses, they will talk about the doctors, they will talk about all our health professionals in our hospitals who saved lives and who kept Victorians safe and everything that we have done to support them and they will talk about the teachers and education support staff who got our students through and supported their learning on that journey.

We know from the report that I was a part of in the first stage for the Minister for Education—on the experiences through remote and flexible learning—that it did not always go well. We know that those students who needed additional support, or certain cohorts, were disproportionately impacted in their learning, and that is why we announced the tutors package—more than 4000 tutors to support our students to get back on track, to make sure that no student gets left behind in their learning. It is so very inspiring to see that work underway.

Now, in the few moments I have got before the adjournment I want to touch on something that I am deeply passionate about as well, and that is support for mental health and wellbeing. We established a royal commission into mental health and wellbeing, and it is a really important and telling policy. As someone who has lived with anxiety and confronted that during my university years, I know the stigma that is attached to mental health. I know that it is tough for people to get that support, care and comfort—that step to get that care—and we know at the acute level how people suffer in their outcomes. We know that getting beds, getting that support, is a vicious circle. We saw that in the evidence that was provided before the royal commission. We saw that we needed patient-centred support; we needed the experience of those to be understood and learned from.

This budget delivers on those interim recommendations of the royal commission. We lose more people to suicide each year than the road toll. It is a devastating tragedy, and really all of those people that are lost we need to see as preventable lives lost. We have got to do more in this space and support people in their mental health and wellbeing journey. Again, it is not just about empty rhetoric; it is about supporting those families, those communities and those individuals in some of the most challenging circumstances to make sure that they are never left behind. You can say it, but you have got to fund it
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

CAULFIELD ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:30): (5320) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Education, and I refer the minister to recent unsuccessful applications from two outstanding local primary schools in my electorate of Caulfield to the Victorian state government’s Minor Capital Works Fund. I refer specifically to the applications of Caulfield South Primary School and Caulfield Junior College. In both of these instances the schools have applied for funding—in Caulfield South Primary School’s case, funding for a much-needed basketball court for students to ensure they have a safe facility to play at during the breaks and to conduct PE classes. This is a great school. It is a school that continues to grow, but unfortunately it is really stretched in terms of the facilities—there are very few recreational facilities in the school. Also it is really stretched when it comes to inclement weather. As part of the grant they had applied for a shade sail. I have raised this before in the Parliament, because particularly, again, children do not have anywhere to go during bad weather and certainly in the extreme times of summer they do not have that shade sail. In both of these instances Caulfield South Primary School has missed out on funding.

The second application was from Caulfield Junior College for approximately $40 000 for much-needed replacement of fences as well as improvements to onsite security and access. This school is across the road from me. It is a great school and is over 100 years old. Chris Chant and the team do a fantastic job. They have put in their application. I spoke to Chris today. He was absolutely surprised—staggered in fact—that he was not on the list. Looking at the amount of schools that have put in grants, I have been told by these principals and others who have spoken to other schools that they have put in applications for money and they have actually got more than what they asked for—surprisingly more than what they asked for.
These schools are in desperate need of this funding. I request that the Minister for Education meet with these schools to see what we can do to be able to support these schools with funding going forward. This is certainly something that I am prepared to work with the government on. I know a member in the other place, Nina Taylor, has visited these schools. I am more than happy to go with Nina Taylor to these schools, and if Nina could bring the government chequebook, we will hopefully be able to support these schools that are in urgent need of repair. We do need to ensure that there is equity in terms of funding for these schools. We cannot have some schools miss out while other schools get more than they deserve. Therefore I ask if Caulfield Junior College and Caulfield South Primary School can get the funding that they deserve.

KEALBA LANDFILL

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (19:33): (5321) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The action that I seek is that the minister request an urgent report into the Kealba landfill hotspots. As I have previously raised in this chamber, the hotspots and fires at Kealba landfill continue to affect my community. Twelve months on we continue to have the issue of the odour and smell throughout the Kealba and St Albans communities.

We have tirelessly advocated, my office and community members in Kealba and St Albans, for a resolution to this issue over the past year. My office has provided regular updates via mail and social media to the local community, and I have, as I said, raised this matter as urgent in this place and also with the EPA directly in the last 12 months. We continue to have challenges when it comes to communication from the EPA, but I would like to note and thank the minister’s office for recently facilitating an urgent meeting with community representatives, Barro Group and the EPA. I think it was a productive first meeting. We will have another meeting later on this week to discuss arrangements during Christmas and the new year.

We have already received advice that the works will now be suspended on 23 December 2020 and recommence on 4 January next year, and we are hoping that there will be a reduction in odour during the Christmas period. This was advised by Barro and the EPA, but of course we will be monitoring and reporting to the EPA. Most importantly, we have been advised by Barro that in February hopefully we can see the conclusion and the back of this issue that has affected my residents. As I have previously said, I actually live around the corner from the site so I totally understand the residents’ concerns, as a resident of over 30 years.

So my community is seeking a speedy resolution, but more importantly we are seeking a report on what exactly has occurred in the last 12 months. It is really important that the EPA provide this report and, most importantly, outline how they intend to move forward, providing those measures so that this will not be occurring in the future. I think that is what our community is really expecting. I look forward to receiving a response from the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change on this very important matter that has been really affecting my community for the last 12 months, and I hope during the next couple of months that we will see, as I said, a conclusion to this odour and smell that has affected the Kealba community.

ROADSIDE VEGETATION

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (19:36): (5322) My adjournment tonight is also to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action that I am seeking is much stronger support for roadside vegetation clearing and roadside burning. Now, in recent weeks we have had some excellent work being done by VicRoads contractors in the areas of Sarsfield and Gelantipy, two locations that were basically razed in last summer’s fires. What has occurred in recent weeks is we have had a Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning intervention that on three occasions has stopped these works. Now, the contractor was doing a fantastic job, which was very well received by the community. He was chipping the burnt trees and the dangerous trees, leaving the large trees there that were okay and creating this park-like roadside that was much, much safer and, as I said, very well received by the community that went through this horrible experience last year. What has
happened in recent weeks is DELWP in its intervention has instructed this contractor that he can only remove the trunks of the dangerous trees and the stumps. He has actually got to leave the heads of these trees where they fall, and he has got to leave all the debris on the ground. What this is doing is massively increasing fuel loads.

It seems that there is this great dilemma in DELWP at the moment. They need to decide whether they are going to leave our roadsides full of rubbish in the name of habitat and vegetation protection or clear these roadsides for human safety and protection of property. You cannot do both. Now, if they want to leave these roadsides full of rubbish and debris and long grass and the like, they must take responsibility for the consequences that occur as a result of that over summer. You just cannot have it both ways.

So I ask the minister to please address this in line with the community expectations that these areas are cleared—they want the safety as we head into another summer—and instruct her department to be more cooperative with these contractors in relation to roadside vegetation clearing but also roadside burn applications. Let our CFA volunteers get on with the job of what they do best—protecting us and making our community safer.

**BUSINESS CHAMBERS AND TRADER GROUPS PROGRAM**

**Mr Brayne** (Nepean) (19:38): (5323) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Small Business in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update to my community on how the Grants for Business Chambers and Trader Groups program is supporting businesses and trader groups in my electorate of Nepean. Business chambers and trader groups play a vital role in supporting our business communities, and these grants will help our local businesses and communities recover. Here in the electorate of Nepean a number of chambers and trader groups have received grants from the program, including the Mornington Peninsula Vignerons Association. The grants program is an important support for our local traders as we move to COVID normal and a COVID-safe summer. I look forward to a response from the minister.

**COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY LILYDALE BRIGADE**

**Ms Valence** (Evelyn) (19:39): (5324) My adjournment is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in relation to a matter that I have corresponded with her regularly about over 18 months regarding three volunteer firefighters of the Lilydale CFA brigade who were the subject of a three-year investigation into alleged corruption, which has now been dropped by the CFA because there are grave questions about whether the investigation was conducted unlawfully. Minister, the action I seek is for the Andrews government to appropriately compensate Mr Frank Whelan, OAM, Mr Warren Davis and Mr Steven Lines for the pain and suffering and mental anguish and significant financial burden they have endured to vindicate themselves for doing nothing wrong, after CFA management wrongly suspended these men for alleged corruption over three years; to disclose how much money this government and the CFA have spent on consultants and lawyers pursuing this; and to publicly apologise to these men for the harm that this witch-hunt has caused them, their families and our local community.

Minister, you will be aware that representation for these volunteers has been made to the CFA in relation to it breaching its statutory duty and owing a duty of care to these volunteers after it seems they were invalidly suspended and investigated. After more than a month the CFA has failed to even acknowledge this letter. It seems CFA management did not comply with its statutory obligations provided for by the Country Fire Authority Regulations 2014. In fact IBAC’s annual report 2018–19, tabled in Parliament on 29 October 2019, makes reference to Operation Icaria, an investigation at the request of CFA in relation to these volunteer firefighters. On page 44 of the report IBAC states:

The allegation of undisclosed and improper financial benefit to members of both the—

Lilydale—
brigade and the private company was unsubstantiated.

A review of the evidence found significant evidentiary gaps and mitigating factors but, on consideration of the Office of Public Prosecutions’ guidelines on prosecutorial discretion, it was found the criteria for reasonable prospect of conviction and public interest were not met.

Minister, as the Office of Public Prosecutions’ own guidelines were not satisfied for prosecuting these matters, it is inexplicable that the CFA chose to then continue to subject these three volunteers for a further year to ongoing suspension and a new CFA investigation after the IBAC investigation found nothing. This smacks of nothing but a personal attack on these individuals. Indeed it is curious that after the former senior management left in quick succession recently—the chief officer, CEO and board chairman—suddenly these three volunteers were reinstated and the CFA charges dropped.

Minister, these three volunteer firefighters have served their community and Victoria with distinction, share a combined total of 112 years of dedicated service and have put their lives on the line for our community many times over. They deserve better and nothing less than to be compensated and to have a full response to the actions I have sought on their behalf.

**WENDOUREE ELECTORATE HEALTH WORKFORCE**

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:42): (5325) I direct my adjournment matter to the Minister for Health. The action that I seek is for him to visit my electorate of Wendouree to meet with Ballarat Health Services and Ballarat Community Health to thank our outstanding health workforce for the excellent job they did managing the COVID pandemic. Ballarat has an amazing healthcare workforce who cared for the 59 people in our community who had COVID and stopped the spread in our region. As a result of their great work we have recorded zero deaths. Our healthcare workers are truly world class and deserve the highest praise and recognition.

I would particularly like the Minister for Health to meet with Ballarat Health Services’ COVID rapid response team and the contact-tracing team. The rapid response team, a partnership between Ballarat Health Services and Ballarat Community Health, is to be praised for the work it did in Shepparton following their outbreak and also in Nhill. I would like the minister to visit Ballarat Health Services’ COVID ward to thank frontline workers who directly delivered care to others while putting their own health and wellbeing at risk. I would be pleased to show the minister the new ICU ventilators.

It would also be a great opportunity to meet with Ballarat Community Health’s rapid response team, who established the Little Bridge Street COVID-testing clinic in central Ballarat, as well as the high-risk accommodation response team. The COVID-testing clinic operated from 18 July to 9 October and completed 4960 tests. I am very proud of the excellent care provided by Ballarat healthcare professionals and the strong leadership they have provided our community throughout this challenging 2020.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the entire Ballarat community for their efforts and for all they have sacrificed to stay safe and stop the spread of COVID. I look forward to the Minister for Health’s response and welcoming him to my electorate of Wendouree.

**V/LINE SERVICES**

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (19:44): (5326) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I am seeking from the minister is that he revise his timetabling announcement to reflect the needs of all of regional Victoria. Last week the minister announced another timetable redesign for both metro and regional trains, something he called ‘the biggest timetable change in a decade’. I do note that the last time the government reshuffled the timetable it actually made 271 V/Line train services even slower, which is something that I think most commuters did not think possible.

While we do not know the impact of this redesign on the speed of services, because the new timetable is not being released until January, we do know that the vast majority of the state is missing out on extra services. While it was billed as building a train network for the future, most of the state’s V/Line network has been overlooked: 125 of the 170 extra weekly services have been earmarked for Ballarat,
which is great for Ballarat, but Geelong, Bendigo and Traralgon are the only other places to receive additional services. Seymour in particular has been dudged. Our region is growing, yet while additional services have been announced for every other short-haul line, there is no change to the Seymour line and the needs of every long-haul line in the state, including the Shepparton, Albury, Echuca, Swan Hill, Bairnsdale, Warrnambool, Ararat and Maryborough lines, have been ignored.

In the context of the year that has just been, I really think that modelling demand for services based on current patterns of travel does not account for the changes that we are likely to see in regional Victoria. I think if there is one silver lining to COVID, it is that it has fundamentally changed the way workplaces operate and where people can actually do their work from. The expectation that someone who works a corporate job in the city turns up to the office every day is quite possibly a thing of the past. The last few months have really proven to many workplaces that you do not need to be sitting in an office in order to do your job properly. That presents an enormous opportunity for regional Victoria. We have the chance to finally change the settlement pattern of this state, and with the right policy settings more people will have the opportunity to hold a job in the city but to enjoy the amazing lifestyle benefits that regional Victoria offers. For towns like Benalla, Shepparton, Warrnambool, Bairnsdale and all the hundreds of other smaller communities around the state which are too far from the city for people to make that daily commute, this could be an absolute game changer. But we will miss the chance to capitalise on this if we do not have the right infrastructure in place, and that starts with reliable and accessible V/Line services so people can have the confidence that they can get back to the city when they need to.

SOLAR HOMES PROGRAM

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (19:47): (5327) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Solar Homes. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with residents of Burwood to discuss the benefits of the Andrews Labor government’s Solar Victoria battery rebate which recently has opened to all postcodes across Victoria, meaning it is now available to postcodes within the electorate of Burwood. The Solar Homes program is supporting eligible Victorian households to install a solar battery by providing a point-of-sale discount up to a maximum of $4174. Access to this rebate has been a growing request from my constituents, and the announcement that the rebates are now available across all Victorian postcodes has been very well received.

Even though we are in the inner east of Melbourne, deep in the cosmopolitan suburbia of Australia’s greatest city, Burwood constituents are keen to reduce their reliance on the electricity grid that surrounds them. They are eager to be at the forefront of advancements in clean energy, such as solar, and are outspoken in their advocacy for strong government policy in this area. The take-up of solar panels has been extremely popular in Burwood. In a typical home with solar panels part or all of household energy usage may be met by solar generation, of course while the sun is shining. Any excess solar energy is exported to the grid. Shortfalls, most often experienced in the early morning, evening, overnight or during cloudy weather, are met by importing electricity from the grid. When a battery is added to an existing rooftop solar system or rooftop solar panels are installed with a battery together in a new system, the excess solar energy not used at home during the day can be used to charge the battery. The energy stored in a solar battery system is used in the home whenever there is energy usage above the level produced by the solar panels, and this battery-stored energy can power household appliances before any energy is required to be imported from the grid. This is a significant step towards energy autonomy for Victorian households.

Previously, purchasing solar batteries for the home was expensive and not affordable for many, despite the energy cost savings over time. However, like most new technologies, the price of solar batteries is coming down, and this shift in the cost combined with the Solar Homes program solar battery rebate has made batteries an affordable investment for Victorians without losing the significant savings and returns. Solar Victoria estimates that installing a battery can help a typical household save up to $640 a year. There is also the option for a battery owner to participate in a virtual power plant, providing
the potential to trade in the electricity market, deliver network stability and help grid support, which
will ultimately help lower electricity costs for all consumers.

I am sure many Victorian homes will be using clean energy to power their televisions on Boxing Day
to watch the test, and I have many fingers crossed for the sun to be shining on that day. However, if
the clouds do come over and the covers are rolled out on the pitch at the ‘G, those households that are
equipped with solar batteries will keep their TVs on using the clean, green energy stored in their solar
batteries rather than reverting to paying for commercial electricity imported via the grid, and that is
good news for everyone.

**OPIATE REPLACEMENT THERAPIES**

**Dr READ** (Brunswick) (19:50): (5328) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and
the action I seek is for the Victorian government to pay the pharmacy charges for people receiving
opiate replacement therapies such as methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone. Pharmacists charge a
fee for their service every time they dispense opiate replacement, either once-a-day methadone or daily
or weekly buprenorphine/naloxone. This fee is not covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
and is a significant barrier to people commencing and remaining on treatment. People on methadone
are charged dispensing fees of around $140 a month, but the next person in the pharmacy queue usually
pays $40 or less per month for their medication. Less than half the pharmacies in Victoria in fact
provide opiate replacement therapy because the financial support is inadequate.

I recall one patient with a longstanding heroin habit who often failed to pick up her methadone because
of the fee. One day she was admitted to the intensive care unit with an infected heart valve, which had
to be replaced. Post-operative complications kept her in hospital for many weeks. Her heart infection
resulted from a contaminated heroin injection. Intensive care admissions cost about $5000 a day and
methadone fees are around $35 a week. Her GP and I both felt that she may have avoided that near-
fatal infection if her methadone had been subsidised by the state.

Other states subsidise this treatment, and Victoria already pays for opiate replacement for those
aged 18 and under and for recently released prisoners. Ideally the commonwealth would pay the
pharmacist this fee for their service, but while they do not, Victoria should step in. Opiate replacement
therapies help people with addiction take control of their lives. Helping more people onto these
therapies will prevent overdoses and expensive hospital admissions. Subsidising this treatment will
help people remain on therapy and prevent much of the crime and imprisonment associated with an
addiction to an illegal drug. All of this will save the state money, and this is why removing fees for
opiate replacement therapy was recommended by pharmacy and medical bodies and by the Law
Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee in their 2018 report.

According to budget figures, about 14 000 Victorians currently receive this treatment. However,
global disruption to the illegal heroin supply due to COVID-19 has reportedly led to more people
recently seeking opiate replacement therapy. We cannot continue this decades-long wait for the
commonwealth to pay, because if we do not act now, all Victorians will lose.

**GARRANG WILAM PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Ms CONNOLLY** (Tarneit) (19:53): (5329) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and
the action I seek is that the minister join me next year for the opening of Garrang Wilam Primary School
in Truganina, the newest school in the Tarneit electorate. This is the third school built in Tarneit by our
government, and after the budget two weeks ago I am very, very happy to be able to say it will not be
the last. I myself had the privilege of visiting the school last week, and to say that I was impressed would
be an absolute understatement, because in my view this school is an architectural marvel.

Everything you can think of that a school needs, Garrang Wilam has it—right down to inclusive
facilities for hearing-impaired students. That is why I can proudly say that Truganina families who
will be sending their kids to this school starting next year can look forward to first-class learning
facilities that should be standard for future government schools. Minister, I look forward to seeing you out in Truganina to see for yourself just how fantastic this new primary school is in my local community.

RESPONSES

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong—Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) (19:54): The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding the funding for Caulfield South Primary School and Caulfield Junior College. The member for St Albans raised a matter for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change requesting an urgent report into Kealba landfill hotspots. The member for Gippsland East also raised a matter for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change requesting stronger support for roadside vegetation clearing and burning. The member for Nepean raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business requesting an update on how grants for chamber and trader groups are helping his electorate. The member for Wendouree raised a matter for the Minister for Health asking that he meet with her local health workforces and celebrate their amazing achievements in her local constituency. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport requesting that he revise train timetables to meet the needs of people in regional Victoria. The member for Burwood raised a matter for the Minister for Solar Homes requesting that she meet with local residents to discuss the solar battery rebate. The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the Minister for Health regarding potential government funding or subsidies for pharmacy charges relating to people receiving opiate replacements. The member for Tarneit raised a matter for the Minister for Education requesting that he join her for the opening indeed of the newest school in the Tarneit electorate in Truganina, which I can tell she is deeply excited about. A wonderful achievement and a wonderful piece of architecture too, by the sounds of it, and a place where young people in her constituency will get the education they need and deserve, which will help them flourish into wonderful adults, some of whom will hopefully be sitting in this place.

I will refer all matters to the appropriate ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, could you also respond to the member for Euroa, please.

Ms WILLIAMS: I thought I did respond to the member for Euroa, which was a matter for the Minister for Public Transport requesting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I beg your pardon, Minister; the member for Evelyn.

Ms WILLIAMS: Okay. That is right, so the member for Evelyn—apologies—raised a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services regarding three volunteer members of the CFA at Lilydale, I believe it was, and I will refer that matter as well as all others to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7.57 pm.