The Governor
The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

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

The ministry

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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 Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers The Hon. AR Carbines, 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 Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for Equality ......................................................... The Hon. MP Foley, 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
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Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development ....... The Hon. M Thomas, MP
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs .................................. The Hon. G Williams, MP
Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing and Minister for Child Protection ................................................................. The Hon. RW Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary ........................................................................... Ms S Kilkenny, MP
OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Speaker
The Hon. CW BROOKS

Deputy Speaker
Ms JM EDWARDS

Acting Speakers
Mr Blackwood, Ms Blandthorn, Mr J Bull, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, Ms Kilkenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, 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. MJ GUY

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party
Mr DJ SOUTHWICK

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
Ms LE STALEY

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 Couzens, Mr Eren, Ms Ryan, Ms Theophanous and Mr Wakeling.

**Environment and Planning Standing Committee**
Ms Connolly, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Ms McLeish and Mr Morris.

**Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee**
Mr Angus, Mr Battin, Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

**Privileges Committee**
Ms Allan, Mr Carroll, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan, Ms Staley 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 Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.
*Council*: Mr Erdogan, 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 Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.
*Council*: Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

**Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee**
*Assembly*: Mr J Bull, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.
*Council*: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Erdogan and Ms Shing.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**
*Assembly*: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O’Brien, Ms Richards and Mr Richardson.
*Council*: Mr Limbrick, Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**
*Assembly*: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly, Mr Morris and Ms Theophanous.
*Council*: Ms Patten and Ms Watt.
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- Kinder Tick
- Telehandler training
- Tarneit electorate bus services
- Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria
- Monash Demons
- Hospital energy supply
- Coburg Harriers Athletic Club
- Student devices
- Doreen RSL sub-branch
- Responses
Tuesday, 16 March 2021

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 12.02 pm and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (12:02): 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

STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:02): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the following arrangements to come into effect immediately and to remain in place until 19 March 2021:

Cleaning of the Chamber

(1) The Speaker may order additional breaks to facilitate cleaning in the Chamber.

Reduced number of members in the Chamber to assist with physical distancing

(2) Subject to paragraph (6), the House will be composed of the Chair and no more than 56 other members, being 34 from the Government, 17 from the Opposition, two Greens members and three independent members.

(3) Except as provided for in paragraph (6), if more members than those listed in paragraph (2) vote in a division, the Clerk will not count their vote.

Quorum

(4) The House gives the Chair further discretion in ringing the bells to form a quorum under SO 29, provided the Chair is confident that a quorum is present within the parliamentary precinct.

(5) If, under paragraph (4) and SO 29(1), the bells are rung to form a quorum, the provisions under paragraph (2) are suspended until a quorum is formed.

Divisions

(6) For questions relating to the passage of bills on the government business program, the provisions of paragraph (2) are suspended and divisions will take place as follows:

(a) the Chair will direct that the lower and upper public galleries be cleared;

(b) the lower and upper public galleries are included as part of the Legislative Assembly Chamber until the conclusion of the consideration of all items on the government business program;

(c) the House will be composed of all members;

(d) the Chair and up to 56 members may attend on the floor, up to 15 members may attend in the lower public galleries and up to 16 members may attend in the upper public gallery;

(e) the Chair will direct the Clerk to ring the bells for four minutes for the first division and one minute for any subsequent divisions;

(f) the Chair will direct that the doors, including the doors to the public galleries, be locked and state the question being voted on;

(g) the Chair will ask members who are voting ‘aye’ to stand in their place and, in turn, will ask members who are voting ‘no’ to stand in their place;

(h) the Clerk will count the votes; and

(i) the Chair will announce the result to the House.

Motion agreed to.
Members

PREMIER

MINISTER FOR PREVENTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Absence

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (12:03): I advise the house that for this week I will answer questions for the Premier, and the Minister for Regional Development will answer questions for the portfolios of Aboriginal affairs, prevention of family violence and women.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

LATROBE VALLEY EMPLOYMENT

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (12:03): My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, 800 Hazelwood workers lost their jobs after the government tripled taxes on the business, forcing it to close. The minister promised to help them with employment. Four years on, for how many of those 800 sacked Hazelwood workers has the minister found a job?

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (12:04): I thank, I think, the Leader of the Opposition for his question. This is an important question that is loaded with inaccuracies. The inaccuracies are absolutely there for everyone to see. We know that private companies have made their decisions around the closure of Hazelwood and of course EnergyAustralia made their announcement last week with respect to the early closure of Yallourn power station. Let me be absolutely clear: the agreement that we have struck with EnergyAustralia has at its very heart the future of every single worker in the Latrobe Valley. It has that at its very, very heart. Seven years notice to actually assist—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I did not mention Yallourn or Yallourn workers in the question. The question was about 800 sacked Hazelwood workers and how many of those have found a job. I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question I actually asked.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do uphold the point of order. I ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

Ms D’AMBROSIO: Leadership is working with communities to put in place training opportunities, to put in place new opportunities for other jobs to be found. Absolutely that very point about the Hazelwood workforce—we had a very, very clear agenda, the strongest agenda, the strongest investment of any government in the valley for workforce transfers to other power stations, new opportunities for employment. Only this government looks after workers. Only this government walks alongside every single worker so they all have a future.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the question went to how many of those 800 sacked workers the minister has found a job for. I ask you to bring her back to answering that important question. Those workers deserve an answer.

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

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (12:06): Given the government has failed to find full-time employment for hundreds of sacked Hazelwood workers, why should Yallourn workers or their families have any faith that this government will find them a job?
Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (12:06): That is a real question—jobs. Be in no doubt that our announcement last week together with EnergyAustralia, who made the decision to retire Yallourn power station earlier than they had intended, has at its very heart the future of every single worker in the Latrobe Valley. Seven years notice is more than what the Leader of the Opposition will have with his job.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! When the house comes to order. The Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition can have a conversation outside if they wish to.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (12:07): Today I am pleased to update the house on progress in our massive pipeline of investment in transport infrastructure. The Labor government is investing more than $20 billion—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr MERLINO: All this bluster! Can I say we are very pleased that you are in the seat, member for Malvern.

The Labor government is investing more than $20 billion in Victoria’s Big Build in the west, connecting local communities with major upgrades to both the road and rail networks. Over the weekend I was at Werribee with the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the member for Werribee—the Treasurer—as we announced and celebrated milestones on both road and rail. The $1.8 billion road project is reducing congestion and slashing travel times on local roads such as Leakes Road in Truganina, Dunnings Road and Palmers Road in Point Cook, Doherty Road east in Laverton North, Doherty Road west in Truganina and the Duncans Road and Forsyth Road interchanges. The project has cut time on those local roads by 20 per cent and supported more than 1000 local jobs.

We also celebrated the removal of the Cherry Street level crossing, which is the third of four level crossings to go in Werribee and the 46th since we came into office. In total we will remove 75. Boom gates previously held up traffic a third of the time during peak hour, and there was a tragic fatality back in 2012. We make no apology for delivering on our election commitments and creating jobs for thousands of Victorians. That is what we are focused on—creating thousands and thousands of jobs—while those opposite are interested in just one, and we are very happy the member for Malvern is there.

ENERGY SUPPLY

Mr M'OBRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (12:10): My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The 1480-megawatt Yallourn power station—22 per cent of the state’s power supply—will be replaced by a 350-megawatt battery. How can the minister guarantee the reliability of our power supply when this battery can operate for a maximum of just 4 hours?

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (12:10): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. It is absolutely an important question, and I thank him for that question. It is a known fact that seven years notice gives more than sufficient opportunity and signals to the market to bring forward investment for the creation of new-generation power supply to come into Victoria. That is how you do a transition—you have plenty of notice and make sure that you have that energy supply coming in.

We have got in the pipeline between now and 2028 more than 5000 megawatts of new power supply that will be built in Victoria. Let me be very, very clear. We know of course that the market operator themselves—the market operator for the whole of the national electricity market—have the confidence
that this will allow us more than sufficient time to have replacement power in place. Victorians can be absolutely assured that our plan has at its very heart energy reliability, energy security, lowest prices and of course worker support. And that is absolutely what we will deliver.

Mr M O’BRIEN (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (12:11): Is the minister prepared to guarantee to Victorians that the closure of Yallourn power station will not result in increased blackouts in this state?

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (12:12): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the supplementary question. Having a transition and having sufficient time to plan a transition—a transition that is occurring globally as we decarbonise our energy system—is something that our government absolutely understands and is committed to. That is why we took very seriously EnergyAustralia’s approach to us last year to have a conversation—start a conversation—about their plans to retire Yallourn power station earlier than they had otherwise intended. Having no plans in place and letting businesses do whatever they want without any consultation with communities or government is the recipe for energy insecurity.

Mr M O’Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, it was a very precise question: is the minister prepared to guarantee to Victorians there will not be increased blackouts as a result of Yallourn’s closure?

The SPEAKER: Order! I heard the question, and the minister is being relevant to it.

Ms D’AMBROSIO: Thank you, Speaker. I can absolutely assure everyone that this government is absolutely committed to a transition that will ensure that we have more than sufficient power supply to meet all of our needs well into the future. Only this government is managing the transition that is occurring globally, putting at its heart workforce, putting at its heart every Victorian in terms of their energy supply, security and affordability and decarbonising the energy system.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: METRO TUNNEL PROJECT

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:13): As we have just heard from the Acting Premier, there is a lot going on in the transport infrastructure space. I say to those opposite: batten down the hatches; we have got a lot to tell you today. We have a lot to talk about today on our big transport infrastructure agenda. I want to talk a bit about the Metro Tunnel project. Just last week the Acting Premier and I were there at the fantastic South Yarra eastern portal entrance, where we were inspecting the great progress. That part of the project has been completed five months ahead of schedule. It is a great credit to the workforce there. Of course overall this very complex project is a full year ahead of schedule and on track to be completed by 2025. Tunnelling on this project is now 75 per cent complete—that means we are seeing all four tunnel-boring machines on the final legs of their journeys, tunnelling away to dig out the 9 kilometres of tunnel and five underground stations.

When this project is completed, 48 trains an hour will enter and exit the South Yarra tunnel, providing turn-up-and-go services. Also, just yesterday I was at the new Anzac station site on St Kilda Road. It is expected that around 40 000 passengers every day will use this station—a big tram and change transport hub on St Kilda Road. It will transform travel to and from the north and south of the city. You will be 8 minutes away from the University of Melbourne, with direct trains through to the airport when that project is completed. We are focused on this project and the 7000 jobs that this project is supporting—not one job, 7000 jobs. It is a complex job, and in the words of the member for Gembrook, we can’t rule out future challenges while we get on and complete this project.
ANZAC DAY

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (12:15): My question is to the acting Minister for Police. With a month until Anzac Day, RSL sub-branches have no details on the requirements police will enforce for attendance at services and marches. Why hasn’t the government provided clear and specific directives to police and the public to ensure Anzac Day ceremonies can go ahead?

Mr PEARSON (Essendon—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services, Minister for Creative Industries) (12:16): I thank the honourable member for his question. At every stage throughout this crisis we have followed the advice of public health to make sure that we keep the community safe and to make sure that all the sacrifices that have been made by the community are saved. We will continue to listen to the advice of public health on these questions. I think that if you look at what has happened over recent months, we have got a major events framework in place, a public events framework in place, to ensure that at a public event of any description there is capacity for those events to occur in a COVID-safe way. I would expect that whether it is a dawn service, whether it is an Anzac Day march, the requirements with which those events are held will be done in exactly the same way in accordance with the framework.

Mr T Bull: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, if these services and ceremonies are to be classified as tier 2 events with over 1000 people, it is a four- to six-week wait. Anzac Day is a month away, and the minister should answer the question that was asked.

The SPEAKER: Order! That point of order would make a potentially good supplementary question, but the member has the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

Mr PEARSON: The government has received the RSL’s proposal for the Anzac Day march and it is being assessed, as all other applications are being assessed. This is a—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business!

Mr PEARSON: In addition to that, more than 400 local Anzac Day services are being planned at war memorials and cenotaphs right across the state. We have got a public events framework in place that assesses these sorts of events, and the government will have more to say in due course.

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (12:18): A music festival on the Mornington Peninsula two weeks ago attracted a crowd of 8000 people, with footage showing people dancing and partying in close proximity. If the government can allow 8000 people—8000 people—to attend a dance party, will the minister please commit to, by the end of this week, providing clarity to police and the public who want to attend Anzac services to honour relatives and those from the various communities who made the ultimate sacrifice?

Mr PEARSON: Look, we will continue to work with organisers of these events to give them that level of certainty. As I have indicated, we have got the public events framework. We will continue to work with the RSL to work through these issues. I would expect, going to the member’s supplementary question, that in relation to any of these sorts of events people will conduct themselves according to the rules that have been laid down by the chief health officer, and we will continue to work with—

Mr T Bull: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question related to whether that clarity would be provided by the end of the week. We already have sub-branches deciding today that they are not going ahead because of the lack of certainty. We are asking for that certainty by the end of the week. It is a yes or no answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister is being relevant to the question that has been asked.
Mr PEARSON: As I advised, we will continue to work with the RSL to provide certainty going forward on these sorts of questions. At every step of the way we need to ensure that we abide by the public health requirements laid down by the chief health officer, and we will continue to work in consultation with key stakeholders like the RSL to give people the certainty they need.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EMPLOYMENT

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (12:20): I rise to inform the house about the state’s midyear financial report, which shows that 170,000 Victorians found employment between September and December 2020—the largest increase in the nation. The boost in employment shows that Victoria is on track to reach the government’s target of creating 400,000 jobs by 2025, with half of these by 2022 as we announced in the ‘Jobs Plan’ at the last budget and as we are demonstrating our progress. It is fantastic news, and it shows that while those opposite are focused on one job, we are focused on the jobs of all Victorians. The report shows that the unemployment rate declined to 6.5 per cent in December, below the national average of 6.6 per cent and of course well down on the peak of 7.5 per cent in June.

Before the pandemic some 520,000 new Victorian jobs were created between November 2014 and March 2020—more jobs than any other state or territory in the nation. Compare that to the record of those opposite, who left office with unemployment at 6.7 per cent and who had created just 121,300 jobs in four years. Indeed in the December quarter this government created more jobs in regional Victoria than those opposite did in four years.

We have learned that when it comes to the member for Malvern he is not too good with numbers, but he is still better than the member for Gembrook. The fact is that despite these challenges posed by the pandemic our government’s investment in assisting Victorians to recover—$13 billion worth of investment—is reaping rewards and demonstrating that our economy is growing. Our revenue inflows are demonstrating it.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business and the Leader of the House! The member for Euroa—I can see you behind the Leader of The Nationals—please stop shouting.

YALLOURN POWER STATION

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:22): My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, yesterday the Australian Financial Review reported that Australia’s most polluting coal power plant, Yallourn, has done a secret deal with the Victorian government and that this deal likely includes the government underwriting power prices and therefore subsidising this coal power station to stay open for another seven years even if prices are so low that they render the plant commercially unviable. Minister, given that we are in a climate emergency, why has the Victorian Labor government done a deal to use taxpayer funds to subsidise Australia’s dirtiest coal plant to stay open for another seven years?

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (12:23): I thank the member for Melbourne for their question. They are wrong. They are wrong on many fronts, as they always are on these matters. They are wrong when they pretend that they are interested in transition and just transition and fair transition for the workforce but say—

A member interjected.

Ms D’AMBROSIO: But this is six years too late. Let me be absolutely clear that EnergyAustralia made the decision to retire the Yallourn power station earlier than they had anticipated. Our agreement with them is about ensuring there is sufficient power supply in the system. We will work with every single worker in the valley to ensure that they have a fair future, a future that they can look forward to,
knowing that they have got plenty of time to actually plan their future, and we will be working with and walking alongside them every step of the way.

There is absolutely no incongruity between being tough and taking great ambition when it comes to climate change and taking people with us, and this is the only government that ever knows how to do that. This is a nation-leading agreement that we struck last week, and every jurisdiction in the country, no less so the commonwealth, can actually learn from us how to do this—decarbonising the energy system, ensuring that we have ambition when it comes to climate change and taking every Victorian with us, and that is exactly what we will be delivering.

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:25): Many people had expected that with renewable energy driving down the cost of energy coal plants like Yallourn would be closing sooner rather than later. Many people also had hoped that the Labor government would heed the warnings of the UN that wealthy countries need to be getting out of coal asap. The minister herself has said to the media that we have enough energy and storage to make up for a coal plant exiting the market, especially given how often Yallourn breaks down already. Minister, you say that the statement that the Victorian government is subsidising coal is wrong, but can you confirm how much money the Victorian Labor government has given Yallourn, Australia’s dirtiest power plant, as part of this deal?

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (12:25): We do not discuss matters that are commercial in confidence, and that should not come as a surprise to anybody, absolutely. What I can assure every Victorian and those opposite is that this government has a very clear plan for a transition. We are working alongside industry, who themselves understand that there is a transition in place. Our transition will ensure that people will have security, future employment opportunities and training as we decarbonise our energy system, as we are ambitious on climate change and are doing this whilst we give notice to the market to ensure that there is plenty of supply that will be built in time for that transition to occur and result in as smooth a transition as possible. That is the beginning, the middle and the end of it. Only this government cares about all those matters, and only this government will ever deliver action on climate and absolutely take Victorians with it.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (12:26): I am pleased to rise today to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is delivering more jobs and opportunities for people across rural and regional Victoria. While those opposite are focused only on one job, this government’s focus is on supporting the jobs of every Victorian in every community in every corner of our state. Since the Andrews Labor government came to office in 2014 more than 80 000 jobs have been created in regional Victoria, and our regional unemployment rate has fallen to 4.6 per cent—almost 2 per cent lower than when we came to office. While these figures are encouraging, we know that there is still more to be done, and that is why our last budget has invested over $8 billion to help regional Victoria recover from the pandemic.

We understand that different regions face different challenges, and that is why we are listening to local communities, including through our regional partnerships. We know that some regions like the Latrobe Valley are going through significant transitions, and our message to workers, their families, businesses and the community of that region is that the Andrews Labor government will back you. We will support you, and we stand with workers every step of the way every day. I am pleased that our government has helped create over 3000 jobs in the valley through our investment in job-creating projects since 2016. Next Tuesday I will be in Gippsland opening the $57 million Gippsland Regional Aquatic Centre in Traralgon. In January I opened the $17 million Morwell Innovation Centre, and I was delighted on that day to join Alinta, who are onshoring their jobs to Victoria. I know he is not in the chamber now, but the member for Gembrook of course is very interested in a new job, so he will be pleased to know that this will create 230 jobs in Morwell. Those on the other side are only interested in one job—their own job.
MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (12:29): My question is to the Treasurer. With registrations of interest submitted for airport quarantine reportedly involving the Fox and Beck families, when was the last time the Treasurer met with either of these families?

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (12:29): Well, I thank the member for her question. I have got to say, with all the people I meet I cannot recall meeting with the Beck or the Fox family anytime in the last two years. But I go further to say this: whilst it is important that we have a debate about the appropriate provision of quarantine in a long-term and substantial sense for this state, I think it is entirely inappropriate for those opposite to assume anything other than the most appropriate of sentiments from business leaders in this state, who are trying to ensure that the government gets the best value for the community.

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question is not about the business leaders. It is about your mates and how you behave.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is not a point of order. The Treasurer to continue.

Mr PALLAS: I would be pleased to continue. I am enjoying myself at the moment. Can I just make the point that as this state is going through a difficult period the one thing that we cannot do is break the resolve of the community by seeking to undermine the integrity of processes that the government is putting in place, entirely consistent with our probity arrangements. And the other thing that you cannot do is try and distance and discourage the business community, who have a valuable contribution to make to the thinking around policy and alignment of policy and of course quarantining—

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, is the Treasurer, who owned Transurban shares when he did the deal with them, actually lecturing us about probity? Is he actually lecturing us about probity?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members are aware of the correct way to raise a point of order.

Mr PALLAS: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his commentary, and I can make the point: if I had a vote, you would have my vote for Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Treasurer will come back to answering the question.

Mr M O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I have always questioned the Treasurer’s judgement.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (12:32): With live tenders and expressions of interest being submitted to the government on a range of projects, including airport quarantine, what protocols has the Treasurer put in place to ensure full probity is adhered to when he meets with people who are making these multimillion-dollar bids to government?

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (12:33): I find it passingly strange that we hear from the member for Ripon about the idea of preference for Avalon at a time when we have been very critical of the way that the federal government seems to have picked out only one airport for preference in the state of Victoria. But can I assure the member that we are adhering to appropriate probity. The Department of Premier and Cabinet are overseeing the inquiry into the appropriate long-term resourcing of a quality quarantining facility. They are going through a process of location, identification and, ultimately, expressions of interest. That process will be managed at a bureaucratic level, and so far as I am concerned, if what the minister or the member—never a minister—is asking is whether or not we will continue to meet with business to explore the great value and ideas they put forward, we will.
MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EMPLOYMENT

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North—Minister for Child Protection, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (12:34): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government’s focus on jobs for Victorians—very much about ensuring we create 400 000 jobs during this term. This year’s budget was very much dedicated to that aim, ensuring that we provide better pathways for all Victorians to employment. $235 million was allocated to build Victoria’s recovery workforce—very much focused on 500 new jobs in mental health, family violence, health, community services and child protection. They are very much those vital jobs for the human services we wish to provide. And for carers specifically there is a new pathway for those unpaid carers, and we know carers in many ways are marvellous at taking care of others but not at taking care of their own needs, which includes employment and health.

We have also created 119 new food relief jobs, which have been created in terms of the needs, the greater needs, for food during this very difficult time—during this COVID period. You have only got to look at the $2.6 billion investment we have made in the national disability insurance scheme to ensure that there are thousands of new jobs in Victoria providing vital services in the disability sector. So our programs are very much focused on delivering skills—skills that people need in the workforce, skills like numeracy, to make sure that everybody has those numeracy skills they require for their role. Everyone should be able to count. It is important they can count. It is a vital skill in life. Count how many people like you, how many people do not like you, for argument’s sake. You should be able to estimate that nine out of 31 is not a majority, and if you think it is, you are never going to get anywhere. You do not want people making fools of themselves because they cannot count properly. It is embarrassing. It leads to poor outcomes. It might even lead to a lesser job than you thought you might have deserved. But what you will be known as in this house in the future is the dingbat who cannot count.

Mr Rowswell: On a point of order, there are a number of questions on notice that I have asked that are unanswered, which I would draw to your attention and that have gone beyond the 30-day period: questions 5513, 5520, 5434, 5433, 5432, 5418, 5416, 5414, 5413, 5367, 4876, 4760, 4721, 4661, 4602, 4600, 4576 and 4562. Speaker, to assist the process I would happily give this to you to assist in encouraging those ministers to respond appropriately.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for raising those unanswered questions, and if he could provide that list to the Clerk, that would be much appreciated.

Constituency questions

MURRAY PLAINS ELECTORATE

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:37): (5748) My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and it is on behalf of the constituents in my electorate who do not have computers. Is the minister aware of any changes that will be made to the application process for Victorians to apply for a one-off $250 power saving bonus? Currently the only way to apply for a $250 power saving bonus is through an online portal, which means anyone without a computer cannot apply. My electorate office receives calls daily from older Victorians who cannot apply for the $250 power saving bonus because they are excluded, because they do not have a computer. This means those Victorians, like pensioners, who would benefit most from the power saving bonus are effectively being excluded because of the application process being online. This is another example where the Andrews government is discriminating against older Victorians who do not have access to an online service. So again I ask: is the minister aware of any proposed changes to the application process for the power saving bonus so that people do not have to apply with a computer?

ROWVILLE ELECTORATE

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (12:38): (5749) My question is to the Minister for Resources. Minister, why has your department allowed trucks to enter the Boral quarry site in Lysterfield before the legal 6.00 am start of operation hours each business day? Residents in my electorate of Rowville have
attended the site and taken footage of these large, noisy trucks attending the quarry as early as 5.30 am. Hours of operation are made for a reason, and it is vital that the site obeys these rules. Many residents in Rowville and Lysterfield are being woken up by the loud noises these trucks are making. Constituents who live near the quarry are getting sick and tired of the constant disregard of their complaints and deserve to be heard. There is also a large amount of dust pollution, which I have previously mentioned in this Parliament. Yet it is still occurring and causing a great deal of stress to my constituents. These matters must be properly investigated and addressed, as this has been going on for far too long.

ELTHAM ELECTORATE

Ms WARD (Eltham) (12:39): (5750) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Minister, I know you are well aware of the passion with which I have pursued an upgrade to the Hurstbridge line, which will mean more services and improved reliability for my community. At the last election Labor pledged to do just this, as did the Liberal Party, which included a new station in Montmorency, and the Greens party, who wanted to duplicate the Hurstbridge line all the way to Hurstbridge. Both the Liberals and the Greens wanted to duplicate the line alongside our historic trestle bridge in Eltham. The community put their trust in the Labor Party to deliver this project. I have been approached by the Montmorency Train Station Group and Banyule councillor Alison Champion. They are seeking a four-month pause to the Hurstbridge line upgrade to further engage with the local community on this project, with the idea of redesigning the track alignment and position of the new station. Minister, what would a four-month pause to the project mean for my community and the much-needed duplication of this section of track along the Hurstbridge line?

EVELYN ELECTORATE

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:40): (5751) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and is in relation to the dangerous intersection of Hull Road and Mooroolbark Road in Mooroolbark, on behalf of local residents in Mooroolbark and Chirnside Park who want to know: will the government invest urgent funds from the upcoming state budget to expand Mooroolbark Road under the rail line to allow two lanes of traffic each way to pass safely under the rail bridge and fix this dangerous road and intersection? Currently this is a dangerous single-lane bottleneck where only one lane of one-way traffic can pass safely under the Hull Road bridge at any given time, causing traffic chaos and congestion during peak times. That is today. With around 8000 new residents and approximately 6000 more cars projected for the Kinley estate being developed in this location, the Andrews Labor government can no longer ignore this traffic bottleneck and must fix and make safe this intersection while Kinley is still under development.

TARNEIT ELECTORATE

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (12:41): (5752) My question is for the Minister for Early Childhood in the other place. A couple of weeks ago our government launched the Kinder Tick initiative. This initiative is designed to help families identify kinder services that are approved and funded by our government, which amounts to over 2600 services statewide. We have a lot of young families in the Tarneit electorate, and for them early education is so important. We are home to one of the highest proportions of early childhood teachers and educators and have several public and private early childhood providers, not just kinders but long day care centres, family day care centres and creches. In fact we even have early childhood tutors that help young kids learn to read and write, and I know this because one has just opened right next door to my office. My question to the minister in the other place is this: what will the Kinder Tick initiative mean for parents in Tarneit who want their kids to have access to the best quality kinder services in Victoria?
SANDRINGHAM ELECTORATE

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (12:42): (5753) My constituency question is to the Attorney-General. Yesterday in a public hearing of the Integrity and Oversight Committee I was prevented from asking about the impact of Victorian Labor’s underfunding of IBAC, the Victorian Ombudsman and the Victorian Inspectorate. For example, in the case of IBAC, they asked the Labor government in their budget bid for $55.371 million over the forward estimates and instead received $27.1 million—a shortfall of $28.271 million, or 51 per cent less than what they asked for. It is my strong belief that public sector integrity and accountability must sit alongside the institution of this Parliament as the foundation of our democracy. And so I ask: will the Attorney-General guarantee that the funding requested by integrity agencies as part of their current budget processes be delivered to those agencies? To do anything other than fully fund these agencies means that Victorian Labor seeks to actively undermine our democracy. Let us see if they do the right thing.

CRANBOURNE ELECTORATE

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (12:43): (5754) My constituency question is to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. What process is this government taking to respond to gendered violence in Cranbourne? As the minister is aware, Cranbourne has unacceptably high rates of family violence and other disparities that can exacerbate structural inequality. Violence against women and children affects all our wellbeing. The number of people reaching out for support is too high, and we know that those who are reaching out are just the tip of the iceberg. I am proud that Labor undertook a royal commission into family violence and committed to acting on all recommendations. Last month the minister announced that the Orange Door network is coming to the south-east. This network is a $448 million Australian-first initiative that provides free and ongoing family violence support under one roof. I thank the minister for her extraordinary commitment to addressing gendered violence. I welcomed her enthusiastic attendance at yesterday’s march, and I look forward to updating my community on this important reform agenda.

BRIGHTON ELECTORATE

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:44): (5755) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and I ask: what has the state Labor government done to enhance safety in my community after a young girl was sexually assaulted at Dendy Park in Brighton East? Two weeks ago a 16-year-old girl was sexually assaulted in Dendy Park. For background, despite the violent nature of the crime and the park being a community hub, Victoria Police did not notify the community of the assault. Many local parents became aware of the crime through word of mouth. It has left many in my community terrified. As Jodie, a mother of teenagers, has said:

It’s not fair on our kids that they are unable to go out with their mates … without fear of being attacked.

Anne, another concerned parent, has said:

The fact that such a violent crime happened last weekend in our area and has not been formally reported to the community totally undermines the safety of our children.

Anne is right. Why was the crime not reported to my community? Parents now fear that other crimes at Dendy Park might have been hidden too. I look forward to the minister’s response.

NARRE WARREN SOUTH ELECTORATE

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:45): (5756) My constituency question is for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers and concerns the Hampton Park Men’s Shed. Minister, what support is being provided to ensure the future of the Hampton Park Men’s Shed in my electorate? Men’s sheds support so many across Victoria with a place to meet regularly and learn new skills. Recently there has been a local rallying of our community after concerns were raised about the viability, support and future of the shed. Consistent with the findings of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, community-based support services are vital in assisting people to connect, raise issues and
seek help. The Hampton Park Men’s Shed is a valued local service, and it needs to stay. I would appreciate any further information that the minister can provide regarding support for the men’s shed and the services it provides in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

SOUTH BARWON ELECTORATE

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (12:46): (5757) My constituency question is to the Treasurer. In 2017 the Andrews Labor government doubled the regional first home owner grant from $10 000 to $20 000, making the dream of home ownership a reality for many young people. The growth corridor of Armstrong Creek, Mount Duneed, Charlemont and North Torquay has benefited immensely from this program, with thousands of young people moving into my electorate to build their future. My question is: how many first home buyers have benefited from the extension of this program to the Greater Geelong region and the Surf Coast?

Bills

OFFSHORE PETROLEUM AND GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE (CROSS-BOUNDARY GREENHOUSE GAS TITLES AND OTHER MATTERS) AMENDMENT BILL 2021

Introduction and first reading

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (12:47): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 to provide for cross-boundary greenhouse gas storage, to amend the Pipelines Act 2005 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (12:47): I ask for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (12:47): The bill proposes to amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010, a Victorian act, by enabling a uniform regulatory framework for offshore cross-jurisdictional greenhouse gas storage formations located in both Victorian and commonwealth waters.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

TRANSPORT LEGISLATION MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS BILL 2021

Introduction and first reading

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:48): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Bus Safety Act 2009, the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017, the Road Management Act 2004, the Road Safety Act 1986, the Transport Integration Act 2010, the Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2020, the Victorian Fisheries Authority Act 2016 and to make related and miscellaneous amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:48): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (12:49): I am delighted to give a brief summary of the bill. The Transport Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Bill 2021 will support the continued delivery of key election commitments, including a key election commitment to get on and deliver the Alphington link to support the Yarra Trail. The bill will also seek to implement a range of regulatory reforms in relation to cutting red tape across the transport sector as well as important issues around road safety across our state.
Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

**NON-EMERGENCY PATIENT TRANSPORT AMENDMENT BILL 2021**

*Introduction and first reading*

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:49): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Act 2003 to introduce a licensing scheme for first-aid operators, to make further provision for the regulation of non-emergency patient transport to and from medical services and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (12:50): I ask the minister for a brief explanation, please.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:50): I thank the honourable member. This bill will introduce patient safety as a central objective of the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Act 2003 as well as introduce requirements for the increased provision of safe patient services and quality of care. The bill will remove stand-by accreditation for commercial first aid providers and instead introduce a licensing scheme and regulatory requirement for that sector.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

**Business of the house**

**NOTICES OF MOTION**

The SPEAKER (12:51): I wish to advise the house that notice of motion 41 will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 5.00 pm today.

**Committees**

**SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE**

Alert Digest No. 4

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (12:51): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being Alert Digest No. 4 of 2021, on the following act and bills:

- Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021
- Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Arbitration) Bill 2021
- Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (State of Emergency Extension) Act 2021

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.
Incorporated list as follows:

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

* Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978:
  - Order under s 17B granting a licence over Clarke Road Streamside Reserve
  - Order under s 17D granting a lease over Princes Park Reserve

* Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984—Notices under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to:
  - Electricity Safety Exemptions Order 2020 (Gazette G7, 18 February 2021)
  - Statutory Rules 136/2020 (Gazette G7, 18 February 2021), 3 (Gazette G9, 4 March 2021)


* Health Complaints Act 2016—Review of the operation of the Act under s 157

* Planning and Environment Act 1987—Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:
  - Boroondara—C284 Part 1, C294 Part 2, C306, C349
  - Greater Bendigo—C267
  - Moorabool—C98
  - Port Phillip—C190
  - Victoria Planning Provisions—VC195

* Statutory Rule under the COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020—SR 10

* Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:
  - Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 11, 12, 13
  - Documents under s 16B in relation to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981:
    - Secretary Approval Nurse Immunisers—SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19) Vaccine
    - Secretary Approval Pharmacy Immuniser—SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19) Vaccine.

**PROCLAMATION**—Under Standing Order 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing operative dates:

* Consumer and Other Acts Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2021—Whole Act other than ss 1(c)(ii), 82 and 86 and Division 2 of Part 7—10 March 2021; s 82 and Division 2 of Part 7—29 March 2021 (Gazette S110, 10 March 2021).

**Bills**

**CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT (FRACKING BAN) BILL 2020**

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM AMENDMENT BILL 2020**

* Council’s agreement

The SPEAKER (12:52): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Constitution Amendment (Fracking Ban) Bill 2020 and the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2020.
CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT (FRACKING BAN) BILL 2020

EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM AMENDMENT BILL 2020

PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMENDMENT (STATE OF EMERGENCY EXTENSION) BILL 2021

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (12:53): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Constitution Amendment (Fracking Ban) Bill 2020, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2020 and the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (State of Emergency Extension) Bill 2021.

WORKPLACE INJURY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT (ARBITRATION) BILL 2021

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (12:53): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Arbitration) Bill 2021.

Business of the house

PROGRAM

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:53): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5.00 pm on Thursday, 18 March 2021:

- Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021
- Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021

I will only make a few brief comments on the government business program as I have moved it for the house’s support today, noting that there are three bills on the program, which will provide a lot of opportunities for members to speak on these three important pieces of legislative change and reform. Can I also advise the house that there will be time available to particularly go back and focus on the take-note motion to do with the budget. As we have said on previous occasions, the 2021 budget was only handed down in November last year—that is only five months ago now—so it is still very fresh. There are still a lot of programs and projects that are being delivered, and I am confident that members will enjoy the opportunity to go back and talk about the budget, given it was one that was focused on economic reform, it was one that was focused on recovery from the pandemic and it was focused on supporting jobs for all Victorians.

So there will be a lot of opportunities for members, particularly on our side, to focus on the things that matter this week—the things that Victorians want us in this place to focus on, which are those areas of recovery from the pandemic and creating jobs, not focusing on ourselves and each other and partyroom spats that might have been going on over the course of this morning.

Mr Wells: What’s that got to do with the government business program?

Ms ALLAN: Well, take a point of order then.

Mr Wells: So you want me to?

Ms ALLAN: Yes, go on. Why not?
Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, due to the invitation I have just been given, I would ask you to bring the Leader of the House back to the government business program. Or if we are going to change the standards in here, every time we hear about a spat in the Labor party room or the caucus and the secret meetings that go on around the house to undermine the Premier while he is away, let us bring that forward and let us debate that in the chamber.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Leader of the House, who was speaking on the government business program and then strayed, to come back to the government business program debate.

Ms ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. I think I have made my point. Thank you, Manager of Opposition Business. So there will be opportunities to go back and speak on the budget take-note motion, as I have previously mentioned.

Just finally, there are also again this sitting week the changed arrangements for the numbers in this place in terms of complying with COVID-safe arrangements and the arrangements for voting on divisions and the 5 o’clock guillotine at the end of the week. Again I thank the house for its support and the parliamentary staff also for having these arrangements in place. I am sure the Manager of Opposition Business is quite happy managing the quorum numbers on his side of the chamber as he can manage who is in the house at various points of the day. With those few comments, this will be a week where the government focuses on the legislative task ahead of us: the rebuilding and the recovery from the pandemic and supporting jobs for all Victorians.

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (12:57): The opposition will not be opposing the government business program, but I will just make a couple of notes. Obviously today the only bill we can discuss is the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 and we can discuss the take-note motion for the budget, and on Wednesday and Thursday are the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021 and Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Arbitration) Bill 2021. The one point that we will need to seek clarification on is the take-note motion on the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. We will need some advice from the whips and the Leader of the House on whether we are going to have time this week to be able to talk about the take-note motion for the royal commission into mental health.

Speaker, the other issue I want to raise in addition to this is that, with respect, we have had some health advice—you have received health advice—and I am just wondering, through you, Chair, if we can get an update on that health advice about the number of opposition members that we can have here in the chamber and whether we can start moving back to the normal sitting times. That might already be in train, and so be it, but we do raise the point that when the member for Gippsland East today talks about large events taking place down in Mornington the question has to be raised with you, with respect, that we need updated advice. If the advice is still the same, then so be it, but we are looking for that advice for the opposition to be able to get back to having as many people in the chamber as possible with the opportunity to be able to speak. On that note, we will not be opposing the government business program.

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) (12:59): I am pleased to contribute and support the government business program and pleased to see those in the opposition are not opposing themselves. Can I just say in relation to several matters on the program today and this week that I think they are critically important.

On the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021, I was pleased to be engaged and involved with the then Parliamentary Secretary for Health, the member for Mulgrave, in the review of the Cemeteries Act 1958 which led to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 that effectively came into operation in 2005. There is a lot of history. But I think that if you stick at it enough you will see the opportunities to reform legislative practices in this place and the way in which the Cemeteries Act, as it was then known, provided for services, accountability, transparency and greater governance in the community. But some significant work needed to be done on these further amendments to protect people who are directly or adversely affected by an indictable offence and we needed to understand
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how entitlement to the rights of interment can have effects on other individuals around, I suppose, pain and suffering. There are some contemporaneous matters in the community, which we will explore in the debate on that bill. But there are some very significant changes that we need to act on as a Parliament to give some confidence to people with regard to the rights of interment, a sensitive issue, but certainly some contemporaneous matters that require the Parliament’s immediate attention in relation to the amendments to that act.

As the chair of the cemeteries strategic working group, on behalf of the Minister for Health, I know it is a very important sector with nearly 490-odd volunteer cemetery trusts operating across the state. Victorians make very significant contributions to the operations of that sector outside of the class A trusts that receive some remuneration for the very significant organisations that they have responsibility for.

There is also of course the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Arbitration) Bill 2021, some very significant work that we continue to build on of a former constituent of mine, a former Premier of Victoria, John Cain, and the work that he did in his government in establishing much of the workplace injury rehabilitation and compensation legislation. There is a lot more work that we can continue to do as a Labor government to build on that legacy, and the opportunity to review that today and to take it forward this week is critically important.

I do encourage colleagues who have not had the chance to speak on the budget from last November to take the opportunity to do so. I also acknowledge that the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 will provide great opportunities for us to outline again the significant work that is happening here in Victoria, but also some of the very in-parallel policy proposals being put forward by the federal Labor opposition that are very significant for the Victorian workforce. I think that will be incorporated in part of the debate that we will have this week.

The last matter I want to mention is just in relation to COVID matters. It has been great to see the work that has been done by this Parliament, by not only the Presiding Officers but the parliamentary staff, in not only supporting and maintaining as much as possible those connections between the public and the work that is done in this Parliament, but providing great clarity and support to our electorate office staff on the front line as well as to people in the Parliament, to members; they have had to move with the changing circumstances and provide great support to us, which has been most welcome. I encourage them in that work. I am surprised that the Manager of Opposition Business would like to review those matters. I would have thought that leaving a third of the opposition party room out of the chamber might be quite a welcome thing. I notice there were several clearly rostered out of the chamber at question time today, and we will have a look to see who else has been rostered out of the chamber at question time for the remainder of this week. We will leave those matters to the party room to determine, because I am very confident that in this place and on this side of the house we will continue to focus on the jobs that matter, and they are the jobs of Victorians, not the jobs that those on the other side want to fight over while we continue to do our best for the people of Victoria.

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (13:04): It is always a pleasure to stand and follow the member for Ivanhoe when he speaks on any matter; he is actually quite an eloquent speaker. But when he talks about opposing his own side, I am disappointed that he has not been doing any late-night tweeting lately. It has always been appreciated on this side when the member for Ivanhoe is opposing his own side, and a bit of late-night tweeting would be good, I think, probably at the moment—while the cat’s away the mice can play, member for Ivanhoe. I am sure everyone on that side would appreciate some more support from the member for the government’s policies.

But this week’s government business program is largely non-controversial. We look forward to debating the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021, the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 and the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Arbitration) Bill 2021 and the budget take-note motion as well.
I personally have already had a go on the take-note motion on the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System tabling event that was held at the Royal Exhibition Building, but I think it would be good if all members had the opportunity to speak a bit more about that. I was rather alarmed only last week in meeting with one of my school principals who said that as a result of the extended difficulty and remote learning of 2020 he has already this year had seven pupils admitted to hospital with suicidal ideation. That shocked me. As I said, it is the sort of thing that we need to be discussing in this place, obviously with a level of sensitivity. The royal commission obviously set out to address that in part, but also to address the situation of what happened with school students last year. That is certainly a concern, and I would hope that we have the opportunity to further debate that issue in the coming weeks, including this week.

The other thing I would just like to briefly mention, and the Manager of Opposition Business has already mentioned this, is the operation of this house. I made comments in the last sitting week that I was disappointed that the Parliament itself was not open, and I am pleased to see that the front door is in fact open this week. But I actually think that, as the Manager of Opposition Business said, we should be seeing the public health advice that apparently says we can have 50 000 people at the MCG but we still cannot have the public galleries open here because we need to reserve them for members to sit in during votes. I think whilst we always need to look at the public health advice, we should be more proactive in allowing Victorians to participate in the Parliament and actually be here and have our Parliament return to normal as quickly as possible. I know that the government has put the 75 per cent limit on offices, and that includes the public service, but I also know that there are very few government departments that are actually back to anything like that. The Parliament of Victoria should be leading by example and getting back to something more like normal and allowing all members of Parliament to be in the chamber. If we can have 50 000 at the MCG, I am sure we can work out a way that we can have a bit more of a normal process happening here. As such I would like to see, as the Manager of Opposition Business has said, the health advice on that. But I look forward to the debates this week and to taking part in the bills on the business program.

Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) (13:08): The government business program defines the vision, plan and strategy of the government and the constancy of purpose, and you can see how this is needed over time to deliver the results and the reform we want. It is pointed out in the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 again. It was the Cain government back in the 1980s that initially brought this legislation to the Parliament to make such changes. Victoria leads the way in developing initiatives to protect workers, and we are proudly committed to doing that to improve their situation every step of the way. That is what this bill does again. Here is how Labor in power delivers cultural, generational and systemic change. These changes also look at long service benefits, labour hire and equal opportunity. They are all critical, they are all crucial.

Then you go to the workplace safety issues, and we have arbitration to provide timely, low-cost and informal pathways for an alternative to court, providing injured workers with an effective means of achieving resolution to a workers compensation dispute. Again it is the human factor. How do you take care of people? How do you make sure that they are included and get a fair go?

The third bill that we have on the government business program is the Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Bill 2021. Now, this is important in a specific way because it will allow the Secretary of the Department of Health to have the power to direct the surrender or variation of a right of interment and ensure that the rights of victims—all victims—and other persons directly and adversely affected by serious crimes are given appropriate respect and a say in what happens to the remains and the resting place of their loved ones.

We have the take-note motion on the budget—the $49 billion investment to get us beyond the pandemic and the recession, to make the comeback happen for the state of Victoria. This affects all of us, and this was the leadership that was needed to actually deal with these crises. What did we have here? We had the vision, we had the plan and we had the unity, which is what the government wanted to have. And the contrast is stark. We have had exposed today in meetings in this house that the
opposition is numb with fright at the proposition of the next election, and that is not just about what has happened in Western Australia. It goes back to the history; you have to know your Victorian history. It is the phrase that was used by a former Minister of Economic Development, Ian Smith, to describe the decline and fall of the Liberal time when Victoria was seen as the jewel in the Liberal Party crown. You had the long Bolte era, and that is what he did—he described them as ‘numb with fright’. That is what we are seeing here. Here you have it. And then you had former Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett coming out today and saying it was naive and stupid. Now, it is not me saying it; it is a former Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett. So we need now the unity, we need the vision, we need the plan and we need the leadership, and it is clear where it is coming from for the state of Victoria. The Premier slipped and he might be on his back, but in here they are stabbing each other in the back. They cannot leave it alone; that is what it has been about.

This is why this government business program is important. This is what we need to learn from the lessons of history and how you actually get the votes of Victorian people so you can stand in this house and deliver a government business program. That is the point of it: you need to win the support. Here are the strategies. Just think about what is going to happen with the economic development. That is where we are wanting to be next. And another budget is coming up shortly. That is the preparation and they are the meetings that are going on on the government side. They are the commitments. It is talking to the community, trying to build the future, looking at where the new industries and jobs will come from, and that is the point of what we need to get done.

I absolutely want to commend this government business program to the house because it shows the constancy of purpose. It is how you actually keep driving reform, keep investing in the state, keep bringing back the community after the crisis of the pandemic and the recession. This is what Victorians want, and this is what Victorians will vote for. I commend the government business program to the house.

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (13:13): I will make this brief. Earlier in the day, in question time, the Leader of the House got us all excited and said that the government had a whole lot to say and it was all about the Big Build and all that. The build-up was there, and then we get to the government business program and we see the disappointment there with three bills which are by and large just fixes for well-known existing problems and issues that we are already well aware of. One sets up an arbitration mechanism for dispute resolution, which is a common feature for workers right around our nation. That fix will get through. Another sets up to protect victims of crime, and in no way, shape or form would we oppose that; we support protection for victims of crime. And the third, which is the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, is largely mechanical and allows for more flexible assessment of turnover for labour hire licence fees. It is very, very funtional; it is not the excitement that we were getting from the Leader of the House at the start of the day.

But the important thing is some of the administrative medicine and taking care of the house. From the Deputy Premier, through the Leader of the House, we have got some correspondence in relation to some pair requests, which the coalition will certainly support. We wish the Premier, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the Minister for Women—of course there is also the member for Mordialloc; it is his celebration once again, which has been going on for a while, with his new family member—certainly a speedy recovery as they seek assistance with their issues.

Once again I reiterate that I will reach out to the Government Whip and see what he is feeling and his view in relation to the program for this week in relation to the matter of the take-note motion on the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System report. We will continue those negotiations and see whether we can make some contributions. But I am certainly looking forward to legislation coming into the house that will address and seek to amend the issues in relation to that decades-old and generational problem of mental health issues in our society in the state of Victoria. On that note hopefully we can just get on with it, get down to business, and it will allow us to get back into our electorates and look after the people that are most important: Victorians.

Motion agreed to.
Members statements

FIREWOOD COLLECTION

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (13:16): It is going to be a very cold winter this year for all the households in northern Victoria who rely on firewood for heating, because the Andrews government has effectively excluded all those households from Echuca all the way to the South Australian border from being able to go and collect firewood. Despite hundreds of hectares of forest being available close by, for those in Echuca it is over an hour trip to the nearest firewood collection site. If you live in Ouyen, it is 1½ hours. The many people in northern Victoria who collect firewood for their own use do not do it for a fun day out, they actually do it because of economic necessity. They do it because of the excessive burden of power bills and the high costs of bottled gas. Why should a pensioner who is struggling with the cost to heat their home have to have a 2- or 3-hour round trip to get their firewood? I say to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change: have a heart. Show some compassion for all those northern Victorians who will shiver their way through winter this year. Minister, have a look at the map of the firewood collection sites and personally see how far people have to travel to get their firewood. Revisit the number of collection points for firewood in northern Victoria so pensioners do not have to travel so far to get their firewood. There is plenty of fallen dead timber on public land across northern Victoria. It just needs the minister to step in and make sure these areas are listed as collection points for those people who desperately need firewood for heating this winter.

KOOL SKOOLS

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe) (13:17): I want to start by thanking Paul and Trevor out at Kool Skools in West Heidelberg—world-class music studios out there. People like Missy Higgins were first involved in their schooling days in the program and many others, and the program did receive a $39 000 music industry recovery program grant. It was inspiring to catch up with them and the amazing work that they are doing for schools right across Victoria.

SECONDBITE

Mr CARBINES: I then ducked over to SecondBite and Jim Mullan, the most enthusiastic and passionate CEO of SecondBite. Can you imagine the 26 million kilograms of food nationally that they are collecting? That is something like over 145 000 meals every day for people in need. Just the power of that army of volunteers is really inspiring stuff. Again, it is a great organisation running out of West Heidelberg.

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY INNOVATION HUBS

Mr CARBINES: Can I say also that we spent a bit of time yesterday with the chancellor of La Trobe University, the Honourable John Brumby, AO, and of course vice-chancellor Professor John Dewar. There was a very significant announcement of $23 million for digital and bio innovation hubs to be housed in the refurbished buildings there at Bundoora campus to accommodate research and development by students, startups and Victorian businesses. I really do want to give a shout-out to Bree, to Amir and to Natasha, some very inspiring PhD students, for the work that they are doing. I want to commend the member for Bundoora, the Speaker, for his advocacy. As you, Deputy Speaker, know, we are a big group powering on and supporting and advocating for La Trobe University.

COVID-19

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (13:19): This statement condemns the Andrews Labor government for the unnecessary extension of the state of emergency. This government has kept Victorians under a state of emergency for a year, with no accountability. Keeping Victorians under a state of emergency for 2021 will destroy confidence and make Victorians worried that a lockdown can be called at any time for any reason with little or no accountability. The most recent snap lockdown over Valentine’s Day caused devastation to so many businesses across the state. Keep in mind this lockdown occurred due to the mismanagement of hotel quarantine. How can Victorians be expected to trust this government
with a blank cheque when the countless errors that they have made led to 800 deaths and one of the harshest—which, if not the harshest—lockdowns in the world? The Liberal-Nationals will always stand up for freedoms, for a competent and proportionate response to COVID and for Victoria’s economic recovery.

**MCCAIN FOODS RENEWABLE ENERGY INVESTMENT**

**Ms ADDISON** (Wendouree) (13:20): Well done to McCain Foods Australia for its investment in renewable energy at their Wendouree plant. McCain Foods is a Canadian-owned family business with its Australian headquarters in Ballarat. For nearly 45 years McCain has been making chips, wedges and fries in Wendouree, with potatoes mainly sourced from local farms, as well as producing prepared foods including frozen dinners and pizzas. McCain supports many local jobs in my community, including the hundreds of people directly employed by the company at the manufacturing plant in Wendouree, as well as supporting local jobs at local suppliers and contractors.

McCain has a company-wide commitment to reduce its CO2 emissions by 50 per cent by 2030, quit coal power by 2025 and switch to 100 per cent renewables by 2030. Last year McCain Foods commenced a massive 8.2-megawatt renewable system for its Wendouree facility that includes an impressive 17 000-panel farm and a cogenerational anaerobic digester that turns food scraps into biogas to generate energy. This system will reduce the facility’s energy consumption by 39 per cent, with a cogenerational anaerobic digester reducing its reliance on natural gas by 16 per cent. I would like to commend the management and team at McCain on this important action that addresses climate change and secures jobs for our future in Ballarat.

**POWER SAVING BONUS PROGRAM**

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (13:21): This members statement is directed at the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change to highlight the absurdity of the $250 energy saving bonus program. This is a program that can only be applied for online, but it is only available to a demographic who in the most part do not have the skills or access to a computer or the internet to be able to apply. Since this bonus was announced, my office has fielded dozens of calls and visits from older constituents who want to take up the offer but cannot apply. When they ring the phone number that is supposedly there to help them—they do not have access to a computer—they get directed back to the website. As you can imagine, this has created a great deal of frustration and confusion for my constituents, many of whom have said they think it is just a way of making them give up so they do not apply and end up saving the government some money. Minister, this situation just does not work, especially in rural and regional areas where access to support services to help people navigate the internet is very limited and digital literacy levels among our ageing populations are also very low. It makes no sense that the only way to apply for a rebate aimed at aged pensioners is online, and I would ask you and the government as a whole to consider all Victorians when putting schemes in place—not just those with access to the internet and with digital literacy. This demonstrates just how out of touch the government is with my community.

**GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY**

**Ms THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (13:23): This year, 25 March marks the 200th anniversary of Greece’s independence, an anniversary that will be celebrated right across the world. Normally, thousands of adults and children from all generations would march to the Shrine of Remembrance in solidarity with those who fought for freedom, and Lonsdale Street would be alive with Greek music and dancing as we celebrated together. This year, with borders closed but our hearts wide open, the local Greek community in my electorate of Northcote are choosing to celebrate a little closer to home. Multicultural groups across the electorate are hosting lunches, wreath-laying ceremonies, church services and dinner dances in celebration of the bicentennial. I look forward to attending many of them.

I will also join a more intimate ceremony at the Shrine of Remembrance hosted by the Greek national day council and the Greek Consul General of Melbourne—a fitting location given that Greece fought
alongside Australia to defend freedom and democracy in two world wars. And as we reflect and pay tribute to those who fought for freedom after hundreds of years of Ottoman rule, we also reflect on the importance and fragility of democracy itself. We are here in this chamber, in this hall of great debate, with the ability to deliberate on ideas and policy in freedom and safety because there were those before us who fought for democracy and independence. And with that I say, ‘Ζήτω η Ελλάδα! Ζήτω η Αυστραλία! Και ζήτω η δημοκρατία!’

ANZAC DAY

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (13:24): With Anzac Day fast approaching, the Andrews government needs to urgently sort out what is happening with organised commemorations for this vitally important day. With no clear direction coming from the minister’s office, local RSLs are left waiting for guidance. Given that the government has repeatedly sanctioned very large gatherings for causes they agree with, there should be no issue in allowing both the central and the numerous local Anzac Day commemorations to proceed, albeit in a COVID-safe fashion. The minister needs to get this sorted out urgently so local RSLs can in turn organise their local events and ensure this very special day is recognised appropriately throughout Victoria.

ISLAMIC COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

Mr ANGUS: Last Sunday was the annual Open Mosque Day organised by the Islamic Council of Victoria. It was a pleasure to attend the Melbourne mosque and share in this special event. I congratulate ICV president Mr Adel Salman, vice-president Dr Mohamed Mohideen, the other ICV board members and all the imams and volunteers for organising this important event and allowing all Victorians to join in and learn more about Islam.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Mr ANGUS: The release of the 2020–21 midyear financial report on the state’s finances last week provided some truly shocking reading. To see that the deficit for the six months to 31 December 2020 was more than $10 billion was extraordinary. With this, coupled with the rapid rise in the state’s net debt to a staggering level of more than $60 billion, all Victorians should now be very worried about the state’s finances. The most concerning aspect of this is that so much money has been wasted rather than being spent on important community needs. This government is sending the state broke, just like Labor governments before it. The recent downgrading of the state’s credit rating by a second credit rating agency from AAA to Aa1 sends a clear message to all Victorians.

BROADMEADOWS ELECTORATE EMPLOYMENT

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (13:26): It beggars belief that the majority of Australia’s population is still fighting for a fair go, respect and safety in 2021. Such matters do not simply concern gender, they concern justice for all. The economic value of equal pay was established long ago; it is now vital and urgent. The pandemic and recession have hit women hardest. Insecure jobs leave women vulnerable. Australia must implement systemic change. We must especially provide for women hardest hit by compounding complexity.

We have the opportunity to deliver a world-first collaboration by establishing a centre for social enterprise in Broadmeadows. This result can be delivered by linking the Victorian government’s response to the first Royal Commission into Family Violence and the Orange Door network, which provides free services to adults, children and young people experiencing family violence. Financial independence is the next step to empower more women. Microfinancing to seed businesses for women can be based on the model pioneered by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. Broadmeadows has been identified as the best place to launch this model in Australia. These opportunities would help connect the disconnected, empower more women through business and address place-based disadvantage.
GARGARRO BOTANIC GARDEN

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (13:27): The construction of botanic gardens used to be a thing of a bygone era, but not for the town of Girgarre. Girgarre recently finalised plans for the completion of the first phase of design for an amazing botanic garden called Gargarro. The story behind Gargarro is absolutely extraordinary, and I do not say that lightly. The Friends of Gargarro committee have applied for funding from the state government to now complete phase 1. I strongly support their application for funding and encourage the government now to deliver that funding to ensure that this project gets moving and the hard work of that local community is rewarded.

RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms RYAN: The Andrews government is riding roughshod over local communities by refusing to put in place fair guidelines for the development of solar plants. I am supportive of increasing the state’s supplies of renewable energy; however, I believe that this should be done in a planned and considered way that protects prime agricultural land and gives nearby residents fair protections. My electorate is seeing a rush of applications for solar plants, particularly around Benalla, Girgarre and Stanhope. One landholder I met with last week has had a solar plant built directly opposite his house, with almost no protection and few conditions from council. His mental health has been severely affected, and his house is now impacted by glare. In its haste to bring these facilities online quickly, the Andrews government has deliberately designed a set of guidelines that give little protection to nearby residents. I call on the Andrews government to correct this injustice by immediately reviewing its guidelines to ensure solar facilities are appropriately sited.

YAN YEAN ELECTORATE COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (13:29): The weekend just marked a great return to normality in Diamond Creek and across the Yan Yean electorate. Whistles were blowing around the netball courts in Diamond Creek, and I know that particularly the member for Eltham enjoyed that. I am not sure whether Sacred Heart had a win, but I know she really enjoys her role coaching there. We will look forward to together opening the new pavilion that the Diamond Creek Force Netball Association is enjoying.

I was also with the member for Eltham—who was the first one on the flying fox, flying through the air, and it is really the photo of the year—to officially open the Diamond Creek Regional Playspace. With $2.5 million from the state government’s Growing Suburbs Fund, it really is one of those projects that shows just how magnificent the Growing Suburbs Fund is in action. There was $20 000 from Nillumbik shire and $20 000 from the Bendigo Bank. As part of this wonderful project, atop the hill we have a W-class tram that is operating as a community-run cafe. This is the first W-class tram in the state to be repurposed. Congratulations to Josh Allen and the Rotary Club of Diamond Creek for their great work, together with the men’s shed and the CFA.

ALAN MOORE

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (13:30): I rise this afternoon to note the passing, at the age of 100, of Alan Moore. Alan, or Kangaroo as he was known to many, was a long-term resident of Mount Eliza and more recently of Mornington. Far more importantly, he was the last surviving officer of the 39th battalion, the Victorian militia unit, average age 18, charged with defending New Guinea in 1942. The 39th, youth and inexperience notwithstanding, stalled the Japanese advance at Isurava, allowing reinforcements to make their way up the Kokoda Track.

In 2008 I had the privilege of walking the track, and upon return I was asked to talk about that trek to a number of community organisations. Part of my speech related to the experience, but having been impressed by the excellence of the 39th I also spoke about the campaign. Just before I was about to get up to speak at one event, one of the organisers said to me, ‘Oh, we thought we’d better let you know that one of the people in the audience actually fought on the track’. Of course that was Alan. I thought I had better lay the groundwork for any inaccuracies on my part, so I introduced myself to him. He was
generous and said, ‘If you get anything wrong, I’ll tell you afterwards’. Afterwards he was kind enough to say that I got it mostly right and what I did not get right probably did not matter anyway.

Alan’s long retirement was devoted to serving others—in Rotary, supporting Corowa Court aged care and the veteran community, and raising funds for medical and education supplies for villages along the Kokoda Track. In 2019 Alan was very appropriately named Senior Achiever of the Year. Vale, Alan Moore.

COMPASS EDUCATION

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (13:32): I recently visited the offices of Compass Education, an education technology platform, and met with founders John de la Motte and Lucas Filer and their friendly staff. Compass is a popular all-in-one school management system that helps schools to coordinate student administration and compliance, learning management and wellbeing and parent communications as well as finance and payments. It stretches across government and non-government schools. They are a business that started in Victoria and are still located here, right in my electorate of Hawthorn. From small beginnings just over 10 years ago Compass is now used by over 1600 schools, with offices here, in the UK and in Ireland. During COVID Compass was the most widely used student information system in Australia. They believe in local, with most of their 150 staff and all of their school data located in Victoria. Hawthorn is a convenient location for a company like Compass. It is close to public transport, the technology sector in Melbourne and some excellent coffee and restaurants—as a local I know. Compass is a Hawthorn and Victorian success story.

AINSLIE PARKLands PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (13:33): I rise to speak about Ainslie Parklands Primary School and to highlight the need for funding for the school to finish major works. Ainslie Parklands received around $251 000 last year for a playground upgrade, but the primary school will need a significant amount more to complete the upgrade and rebuild. I visited the school back in December and had the opportunity to discuss the plans for upgrade with the principal, Brett MacKenzie, who was doing fantastic work to make the school a great environment for the growing number of students. With the funding Ainslie Parklands Primary School can continue to operate to its high standard and provide state-of-the-art school facilities. This is especially important for the young students who have returned to campus after their learning was disrupted for much of 2020. I encourage the minister to consider granting Ainslie Parklands Primary School additional funding to complete these much-needed upgrades.

DINING ROOM MISSION

Mr HODGETT: On another matter, I wish to bring the Dining Room Mission in Croydon to the attention of the house. The Dining Room Mission is an organisation that supports disadvantaged members of the community and has been doing so since 2005. It provides nutritious meals for those who are struggling and offers additional services such as a free clothes market. The Dining Room Mission is staffed by generous volunteers and provides its meals for free. The organisation is in need of funding to continue to offer these services to the community. 2020 was a tough year, and unfortunately the tough times are not over for many. Many people are still without jobs and turn to the Dining Room Mission for meals. Like many other organisations providing support to the community, the Dining Room Mission had to adapt its services but continued to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic to help an increased number of people. Organisations like the Dining Room Mission that go above and beyond to give back to the community must be supported.

GROW BALLARAT

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (13:35): I rise today to talk about a wonderful organisation in Ballarat called GROW Ballarat. It was funded in 2019 by the Victorian government to work with local business and industry to help find workers but also, most importantly, to create employment opportunities. GROW Ballarat launched its Beeline program in 2020 to support mature female jobseekers to find employment, particularly in this case with Ballarat Health Services. Last week GROW Ballarat
graduated its first Beeline program and the participants. The Beeline program distinguishes itself from other programs as it is driven by industry need, not just training jobseekers for employment opportunities that may not exist.

GROW Ballarat worked with Ballarat Health Services, MatchWorks and Centacare to develop the Beeline program to link women over 45 with real jobs in aged care. Finding work when you are a woman over 45 is not necessarily easy, and I know this from personal experience. The Beeline program took a group of 11 women through a month of work-ready workshops where expert facilitators provided them with insights and practical experience, building their capability to apply for and retain permanent jobs across Ballarat Health Services. To quote one of the participants:

I am so grateful for being validated and for the opportunity of discovery and belief in myself again.

BOX HILL ELECTORATE PARKLANDS

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (13:36): I was very impressed recently to receive a petition from students at Surrey Hills Primary School, organised by their community captain Eamon Newell. The petition includes 245 signatures from students and teachers requesting that Surrey Park and the Canterbury Sports Ground not be used for construction works related to the level crossing removal project at Surrey Hills and Mont Albert. The students want to make sure that they can still use those parks for sport and community activities for the duration of the works. I commend Eamon and Surrey Hills Primary School for engaging in this important civic action and advocating on behalf of their local community. I will present this petition to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure.

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

Mr HAMER: Thank you to everyone in our local community who participated in this year’s Clean Up Australia Day event at the Blackburn Lake Sanctuary. The Blackburn Lake Sanctuary Advisory Committee, led by chair Anne Payne, OAM, and secretary Peter Dempsey, have spent many years caring for this wonderful slice of bushland in the Box Hill electorate and made sure that this year’s event was a success.

SIMON GARDINER

Mr HAMER: I was delighted to recently receive a signed copy of *Cricket at Canterbury: 125 Years of Cricket at the Canterbury Cricket Club 1887–2012* by Simon Gardiner. Simon is Canterbury’s well-known club historian and cricket tragic, who joined Canterbury Cricket Club as an 11-year-old in 1964 and played over 150 games for the Canterbury first XI from 1969 to 1989. I congratulate Simon on his more than five-decade contribution to the wonderful Canterbury Cricket Club.

MOUNTAIN GATE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (13:38): Firstly, can I congratulate the students at Mountain Gate Primary School who I had the pleasure to present leadership badges to. I congratulate those students for being selected, and I wish them all the best for this year.

SCORESBY SECONDARY COLLEGE

Mr WAKELING: Recently I met with the principal at Scoresby Secondary College along with the member for Rowville and we spoke about the need to improve the school facilities. We look forward to working with that school to ensure that they receive an important upgrade, something for which the government to date has failed to deliver any significant funding, to support the work of the principal and the hardworking teachers at Scoresby Secondary College.

LEWIS ROAD–BORONIA ROAD, KNOX, INTERSECTION

Mr WAKELING: I have also been contacted by residents in Boronia and Wantirna regarding the future upgrade of the intersection at Lewis Road and Boronia Road. The federal government has committed to providing funding to the state government to deliver traffic lights at that intersection, but
to date the government has failed to outline its plan to deliver on these traffic lights. It is imperative that the government explain to the Knox community when these traffic lights will be installed, and I call the government to take action and ensure that these traffic lights are installed and implemented.

MARCH 4 JUSTICE

Ms HENNESSY (Altona) (13:39): I rise today for the purpose of raising two issues. The first is I want to place on the record and express my appreciation to all of those involved in the organisation of the March 4 Justice rallies yesterday. It was fantastic, both right across metropolitan Melbourne and in all places in regional and rural Victoria. I want to express my gratitude. I certainly hope the momentum for change that has been requested continues unabated. But I do wish to place on the record my deep gratitude for all of those involved and to certainly say to all of the leaders—from Women’s Health West to local councils that have so genuinely committed to women’s agency and safety in Melbourne’s western suburbs—that I thank them for what they do each and every single day.

COVID-19

Ms HENNESSY: I also want to place on the record my gratitude for all of those in my constituency that are working in preparation for the vaccination rollout. There are a lot of nurses and health workers and ambulance paramedics—lots of people who are working in primary health care—that are working on the vaccination rollout. The Point Cook community hospital, which is one of our election commitments, we await with great anticipation, and certainly I know the Minister for Health is very committed to delivering that project for us.

PAULINE TONER PRIZE

Ms WARD (Eltham) (13:41): Congratulations, Laura from CLC, this year’s recipient of my Pauline Toner Prize for 2021. Named after Victoria’s first female cabinet minister and the first woman to represent my community, this prize celebrates local young women active in the areas of social justice, the environment and gender equality. Laura has shown great initiative in being an active volunteer in the disability sector, in providing refugee support and as a member of the Eltham Electorate Youth Leadership Council. Congratulations, Sienna, Edie, Zoe, Emily, Eden, Fieke, Jayda, Nina, Teyanah, Rachel and Shahla for being nominated, and thank you for all you are doing for our community.

GEMMA WATTS

Ms WARD: Thank you to Gemma Watts for being such an engaging and inspirational guest speaker at my International Women’s Day breakfast.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms WARD: This year I again celebrated International Women’s Day with a community breakfast and my Pauline Toner Prize. Amongst the celebrations this year is anger—deep, frustrated, exhausted anger. I am so angry that women are still not safe in our community, that predators still prey, that women are seen as vulnerable targets to attack, to subject to sexual, emotional and financial violence. I am so angry that my daughters are not safe from predators. I am so angry that boys are still being raised to see women as second class, as subhumans that can be abused at whim. I am so angry that women’s bodies are seen as a commodity by men—commodities that can be touched, viewed, objectified and abused by men who think they have this right. I am so angry that women and girls are still not equal in our society. I am so angry that our Prime Minister believes the words of his male colleague but still has not read the words of a woman who says she was raped by his colleague. I am so angry that many of our male journalists have done what they can to perpetuate the myth of female mental instability—(Time expired)

BAKHTAR CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:42): I was delighted to join the Bakhtar Cultural Association on Friday evening to celebrate the very well known Women of the Year awards, alongside so many
members of the Afghan community of the south-east, across broader Melbourne and actually from across Australia. In the past 12 months we have not been able to see much of each other so it was a particular pleasure to be able to see each other in person. I would like to thank Bassir Qadiri for once again putting on the sort of hospitality and warmth that the Afghan-Australian community is so well known for. I would like to acknowledge the work of the women in particular for putting on an evening of sublime music, energetic dancing and moving poetry because it is in fact the cultural gifts of the Afghan community that I am particularly grateful for. I would like to acknowledge the women who were gifted with awards on the evening because of the work that they do. In particular, I would like to recognise and acknowledge Durkhana Sayed Ansari from Melbourne; Gulgota Bezhan, who is a well-known woman who works particularly on behalf of Afghan senior citizens and gives of her time tirelessly; Zahra Haydarbig; and Roia Atmar. But, finally, I would like to thank the Woman of the Year, Maryam Zahid. She has been a family violence worker who has come to Australia as a refugee. It was an inspiring evening. I was very grateful.

SAY THEIR NAME DAY

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (13:44): The road to parenthood is not always an easy journey. I have been reminded of that recently, after meeting with women in my local community who have opened up and shared with me the tragic loss of their babies. In a couple of weeks it will be 12 years since I myself became a bereaved parent to my daughter, Vivienne Sarah Elizabeth Connolly. As a bereaved mum, I know too well of the struggles parents face when coming to terms with their loss and the long road ahead in learning to live with it. 25 March is Say Their Name Day. It is a day for the whole community to demonstrate that every little life matters and deserves to be celebrated and that bereaved families are deserving of all the support we can give. When a baby or child dies, life as we know it stops for parents, families and their wider communities. It is a pain that cannot be fixed, and over time parents must learn to live with that pain. Many people will want to help but are not sure how they can do it. From my personal experience, I know that this pain becomes lighter to bear and parents often benefit from the simple acknowledgement of their baby, an acknowledgement of their pain. Saying a baby’s or child’s name alongside those who loved him or her is a powerful act of kindness. That is why on 25 March I invite my community and families right across Victoria to join me in offering support to bereaved parents by saying the name of their own baby or the name of a baby that they know is deeply loved and missed by their family and friends.

MICHAEL GUDINSKI

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) (13:45): Last Wednesday I had the privilege of attending the funeral of the late Michael Gudinski, a giant of the Victorian music scene who through Frontier Touring and through Mushroom did more for the music industry in this state and indeed this country than anybody. He is irreplaceable, and he will be sadly missed. I think the attendance at his funeral was a sign of the esteem he was held in by many, many people.

Bills

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2021

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr PALLAS:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (13:47): I am pleased to rise to commence the debate on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. From the outset can I place on record my thanks to the minister’s office for the briefing and the assistance provided to the opposition on the bill before the house. This is broadly an omnibus bill which is seeking to make a range of changes to the Child Employment Act 2003, the Construction Industry Long Service Leave Act 1997, the Equal

The bill in large respects is technical in nature and seeks to make machinery-of-government changes to transfer various functions and powers in terms of the operation of those various acts. With respect to wage theft, it is seeking to transfer various functions and powers of existing areas of government to a new statutory authority—that being Wage Inspectorate Victoria. The powers to be transferred to the new inspectorate under this bill are the existing powers of the secretaries of the respective departments under the Child Employment Act, the Long Service Leave Act and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act. While the bill merely seeks to transfer and not alter these existing powers, the question must be asked why the inspectorate—which is set to exercise extensive and coercive powers under the government’s wage theft legislation—will also administer these other acts.

To frame the question slightly differently, it has to be asked: why will the statutory body tasked with the investigation and enforcement of what the government likes to call wage theft and which bears the name Wage Inspectorate Victoria also be responsible for issuing child employment permits? I would contend that the answer is simple—that this is more about saving face to ensure that the government has work for this new body. As stated by the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce in their view provided to us about the bill:

The Bill appears to be principally aimed at justifying the existence of the Wage Inspectorate Victoria in the event that their proposed role under the Victorian Wage Theft Act 2020 is found unconstitutional.

And that seems to be a very clear reason for transferring these miscellaneous functions to the wage inspectorate. I would like to go one step further and assert that this bill seeks to justify not only the existence of this new body but also the enormous cost of establishing the body to the Victorian taxpayer. In the last financial year alone a Treasurer’s advance of $5.2 million, of which $2.8 million was expended as at 30 June 2020, was provided to fund the establishment of this new body. In addition to this, the 2021 state budget allocated a total of $17.5 million over the forward estimates for the establishment of this body. Now, this is certainly an extraordinary level of funding for a body whose principal functions, as I will explain in a moment, are in potentially serious doubt.

Can I first state, though, that when we talk about wage theft it is clear that employees in the state of Victoria have the legal right to ensure that they are remunerated for the work that they undertake. Whether it is in accordance with an enterprise agreement, an award or a contract of employment, they have that legal right. And in my second-reading speech in relation to the Wage Theft Bill 2020, when it was debated in this house originally, I stated that:

Any action by anyone to underpay an employee by way of contract, award or enterprise agreement is against the law, and the law should deal with those underpayments.

As someone who worked in the field of industrial relations for many years, I have dealt with many of these types of claims. Some of them are overt, some of them happen by accident; but regardless, any person who is not paid in accordance with their statutory entitlements is entitled to receive remuneration at the appropriate rate. But we would point out that in the state of Victoria the management of those issues in regard to wage theft are dealt with by federal legislation. As we know, 25 years ago the Kennett government—supported by the Bracks and Brumby governments, and even up until now the current government—ceded its industrial relations powers to the federal government, and no state government since then has sought to bring back those statutory powers for the conciliation and arbitration of the old state award system which operated under the Employee Relations Commission, where I served as an employee for a period of time.

On 9 December 2020 the federal government introduced the Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia’s Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill into the federal Parliament. Presently the federal bill is at the second-reading speech in the Senate, having previously passed the House of Representatives. Relevantly in that bill, part 7 of schedule 5 covers much of the same ground as the government’s wage
theft legislation, and critically, clause 43 seeks to amend section 26 of the federal Fair Work Act 2009 so as to exclude state offences relating to underpaying an employee an amount payable to the employee in relation to the performance of work and relating to the employee record that is required to be made or kept by the employer under the Fair Work Act. So the federal government’s intention is to legislate in this space, and this is being done to not blindside the Andrews government.

As I pointed out in my second-reading speech at the time we debated the Wage Theft Bill, the federal Minister for Industrial Relations and the Prime Minister had both signalled their intention to legislate in this space at the time at which that bill was originally introduced into this house. Moreover, the Victorian Minister for Industrial Relations and the former Victorian Attorney-General were clearly aware of this process when they wrote to the federal Minister for Industrial Relations on 24 October 2019. They stated, and I quote:

The Victorian Government would like to see broad consultation and cooperation, with a working group established which includes all States and Territories to develop a nationally consistent approach to wage theft …

What is astounding is how in that same letter this government outlined its plan to unilaterally legislate with respect to underpayments. The issues around this were powerfully brought home in its submissions to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment inquiry into the federal bill, wherein the government stated, and I quote:

The Victorian Government submits that the Commonwealth ought to bring their wage theft provisions into line with the Victorian wage theft offences for any national model.

As the old saying goes, ‘pride cometh before the fall’, and the fall is coming because, as we know, well beyond this time when industrial relations was a fragmented area in this country not only did Victoria, as I stated early, refer its powers with respect to private sector employees but the constitutional position, particularly in relation to constitutional corporations, has moved on significantly. When you look at the High Court’s decision in the 2006 case of New South Wales vs. Commonwealth of Australia, and I quote from that case, the corporation’s power conferred by the constitution of the federal Parliament:

… extends to the regulation of the activities, functions, relationships and the business of a corporation … the creation of rights, and privileges belonging to such a corporation, the imposition of obligations on it and, in respect of those matters, to the regulation of the conduct of those through whom it acts …

The position could not have been clearer. Given that constitutional corporations make up the majority of employers in Australia, any attempt to claw back these powers from the commonwealth will only result in chaos and would achieve little. It is for this reason I am sure that this government has opted to attempt to achieve its wage theft agenda through the back door. Recently when the constitutional issues plaguing the government’s wage theft legislation were raised by me upon the introduction of the federal bill the former Attorney-General batted these away and stated that these laws would be able to operate because they relied on the criminal justice system. Now, I know it has been a while since the former Attorney-General studied law, but it was not before the engineers case was decided in 1920 when the reserved state powers doctrine she sought to reassert was exploded. But I doubt the government seriously holds to such a ludicrous position. Such a justification was nowhere to be seen in their submissions to the Senate inquiry on the federal bill, wherein the government submitted that:

The Commonwealth should remove the ‘cover the field’ intention and further amend the Bill to facilitate the concurrent operation and enforcement of state and territory laws.

Extraordinarily, the government asked the commonwealth to allow for the concurrent operation of inconsistent laws and to subject Victorian employers to both. This is no surprise, and we did not need more evidence than that that this government either does not care about or fails to understand that the complexity and challenges of navigating current legislation in multiple and overlapping instruments is chiefly responsible for underpayments, not employer dishonesty. What is the government’s solution to this problem? To bludgeon employers and to increase the complexity of Australia’s industrial relations laws. A few miscellaneous powers will not hide the egg on this government’s face should
part 7 of schedule 5 of the federal bill pass and this government’s wage theft scheme blow up. This
government was aware of the federal government’s intention to legislate in this space, yet it pressed
on with its agenda. The government has spent and committed millions of dollars to the establishment
of this new statutory body and will doubtless pursue a constitutional challenge, throwing yet more
taxpayers money away on its doomed agenda.

We know that the employees of those existing departments who undertake these existing activities will
be continuing across to this new body. In fact 30 years ago, when I worked for the then Department of
Business and Employment, I actually worked alongside the child employment officer who was
responsible for the issuing of notices of approval for those under the age of 15 to work. Principally
approval was sought in the areas of television production where obviously many children participated
in television commercials and movie productions. These have been longstanding operations of
government. The powers upon which these areas are going to be transferred to the new inspectorate are
longstanding, the employees’ operations are longstanding within the current government’s activities,
and so one has to question why it is costing so much money for the establishment of this new body.

When one looks at the labour hire licensing scheme, this bill is another example of the government
attempting to fix a problem. The labour hire licensing scheme as it stands has been inflexible and
damaging to labour hire providers throughout the pandemic. The revenue of many of these providers,
as with many Victorian businesses, has taken a direct hit as a result of the government’s response to
the pandemic—a response we must never forget was only necessary because of the government’s
failures with respect to its management of hotel quarantine and its overall management of the
pandemic here in this state.

During the pandemic labour hire providers have been stuck paying exorbitant licence fees
commensurate to their pre-pandemic turnovers. The perversity of this situation was pointed out by the
CEO of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry earlier this year when he wrote, and I quote,
that:

... businesses, particularly in the events industry, have relied on Business Support Fund payments during
2020. Without a change to the Labour Hire Authority fee structure, a proportion of these payments will be
going straight back to paying licencing fees in 2021 even though their sector has been decimated and social
distancing requirements, venue limits, and travel restrictions means recovery is yet to properly begin.

So while the bill before the house seeks to address this inflexibility, which is welcome, we must never
forget that legislative amendments may not be necessary to achieve this. Currently licence fees are
calculated according to three tiers, which are based on a provider’s annual turnover in the financial
year preceding the day on which an application is made. These tiers and the fees payable with respect
to these tiers are prescribed in the regulations, and there is no doubt the government could have done
more to address this inflexibility by way of regulation. As with so much else, however, the government
was missing in action when it came to providing struggling businesses with immediate relief.

The fact that so many providers had been made to suffer this inflexibility is even more unforgivable
given the scheme’s unwarranted general application. The scheme was introduced purportedly in
response to recommendation 14 of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work. This
recommendation, however, was not for a scheme of a general application capturing all industries. The
inquiry recommended that the scheme be initially targeted at labour hire providers in the horticultural,
meat and cleaning industries. This was because, as the inquiry found, there were, quote, ‘rogue
operators’ that were particularly evident in those specific industries. So even where the inquiry
recommended there be capacity in this scheme for its possible expansion into other industries it was
also suggested that there be capacity to contract the scheme to reflect changing or improved practices
in regulated industries. The government in its approach to the labour hire industry clearly did not wish
to incentivise compliance in problematic industries and has sought only to cripple labour hire providers
in pursuit of its own objectives. There may yet be more evidence in this bill of this government’s blind
pursuit of regular employment conditions for all to the exclusion of all other legitimate forms of
employment.
The bill seeks to amend the Equal Opportunity Act and the Inquiries Act to provide certain employee protections to contract workers. The meaning of “contract worker” within these two acts varies. In the former it applies to labour hire workers exclusively, while in the latter this extends to labour hire workers and contract workers. While these protections are not of great concern, some concern has been raised by stakeholders in relation to the extension of the existing employer obligation to make reasonable adjustment for employees with a disability to contract workers. Concerns have also been raised specifically in relation to the application of this protection to the residential construction industry. Now, whilst we welcome the introduction of a head of powers for the Labour Hire Licensing Authority to waive, reduce or refund licensing fees, creating such a power is not the same as utilising it.

The bill provides an open discretion for the Labour Hire Licensing Authority to waive, reduce or refund licence fees where there are special circumstances. Now, while we would prefer more information about what circumstances would attract the waiver reduction or refund of these fees, we welcome the introduction of this power and look forward to hearing about how the government intends to provide licence fee relief to struggling providers.

While we are also concerned by provisions in this bill which will empower the Labour Hire Licensing Authority to retain, deposit and, more importantly, invest moneys it receives in licensing fees, in our view the scheme should be cost neutral, and any additional amounts received should be returned to providers by way of fee reductions or some other form of relief. This should not be another opportunity for the government to find cash to fund its mismanagement or underfunded projects. If this authority is obtaining money from the labour hire sector to run a scheme, if there are any moneys left over, it stands that those moneys should be returned to the sector. It should be returned to those organisations from whom the payments have been made.

In regard to the long service benefits portability scheme, we are not specifically concerned by the proposed amendments in this bill with respect to these changes. These appear to be merely technical in nature. However, the question has been asked why the government is seeking to empower the authority to provide relevant information to prescribed non-government entities. There has also been, to date, no justification provided for this, and serious privacy concerns have been raised by stakeholders. It is important that the government provides some clarification on this important issue during the second-reading debate.

With respect to long service leave, the proposed amendments in this bill to the Long Service Leave Act 2018 appear to be machinery, save in respect of the prohibition within the act of contracting out. Presently any employment agreement which seeks to annul, vary or exclude any provisions of the Long Service Leave Act is of no effect. The bill seeks to extend this to post-employment agreements, such as deeds of settlement. Concerns have been raised that this provision will have some retrospective operation, and no case has been made as to why such an extension is either necessary or desirable.

With respect to the owner-drivers and forestry contractors provision, we also note that these appear to be broadly machinery. However, an issue has been raised with respect to the fact that there has been no case made as to why the introduction of the criminal offences provision is necessary at the present time, and the only intention that can be gleaned from the bill is an intention to disincentivise other forms of irregular work.

With respect to the bill before the house, as I have indicated, it is broadly technical in nature, and for these reasons the opposition will not be opposing the bill. It is important, though, to recognise that what the bill is seeking to do is empower Wage Inspectorate Victoria with a body of work which is not the creation of new work but is really just a realignment of existing work within the government’s own departments.

Certainly concern is being raised about the significant moneys that are being invested by this government to operate this scheme, given the fact that broadly speaking, to date, it is really only dealing with those people who are already undertaking existing functions. Secondly, amendments with
respect to the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2108, while addressing inflexibility and equipping the authority with the power to offer licensing fee relief, which is welcome, illustrate how so many industries which were never recommended by the inquiry to be covered by this act have had to suffer the inflexibility and unfair operation of the scheme during the economically perilous times of COVID. Whilst we are amending the bill today, those flexibilities should have been built into the scheme when the bill was introduced originally into this house.

There are other provisions of some concern which, as I have stated, we hope the government will clarify and address, such as the retrospectivity of the extension of the no contracting out provisions of the Long Service Leave Act and the provisions of relevant information to non-government entities by the portable long service leave authority. They are issues for which I believe the government needs to place on record an explanation. But, as I said, the opposition will not be opposing the bill before the house. I look forward to the response by those opposite in clarification of those questions that have been raised.

Mr STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (14:10): It gives me pleasure to rise to speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. I am in my seventh year in this place. I have proudly for all that time been a member of the Andrews Labor government, and I think what characterises our government is that we fight for the dignity of workers. We fight for new jobs because we want every Victorian to enjoy the dignity that comes with having stable, secure employment and being able to provide for themselves and their families. But we also—it is in our DNA—fight for protections for workers. We fight for workers rights.

While this bill is mainly technical in nature, it is directly connected to some of those landmark reforms of the Andrews Labor government when it comes to protecting the rights of workers. We speak of our reforms to labour hire where we have ensured that we have stamped out the unscrupulous practices and the unscrupulous operators when it comes to exploiting workers, or wage theft—we heard the member for Ferntree Gully talk down our wage theft laws, where we have criminalised the stealing and indeed the underpayment of workers’ wages. Portable long service leave has given some of our lowest paid workers the most basic of entitlements that most of us enjoy. These are landmark reforms of this Labor government.

While, as the member for Ferntree Gully pointed out, most of our industrial relations responsibilities were ceded to the commonwealth in the 1990s, that does not mean that this government, this Labor government, will not do everything it can to protect the rights of workers. When the member for Ferntree Gully was talking about wage theft he was suggesting—they made the same arguments, I remember, last year when we were debating that bill—that this government should have waited for the coalition government in Canberra before it took action on wage theft. I say to those opposite that a Labor government, a strong Labor government like ours, will never wait for Tories to take action when it comes to protecting the rights of workers. On each of those landmark reforms that are absolutely directly connected to this bill, those opposite voted no. They voted no to giving workers the protections that they deserve, and they should really be ashamed of that, absolutely ashamed of that. On this side of the house we are not only about ensuring that Victorians have jobs—I will come back to our record on job creation in a moment—but we are also about protecting the rights of workers, and I think we have done that over the last nearly seven years.

As I said, this bill is mainly technical in nature, though it does speak to those reforms. It will strengthen seven existing Victorian acts: the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. The overriding purpose of many of these amendments is to provide financial relief for employers while maintaining strong protections and a safety net for workers.

While, as I said, these amendments are mainly technical in nature, there is no doubt that since coming into office it has been this government and our strong trade union movement that has led the nation in
developing policies that protect workers. Of particular importance are the changes that will implement the recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work, also recognising that from 1 July this year the Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body, which was a key election commitment of this government.

I would like to begin on the labour hire aspect of this bill, as I believe it really does speak to the heart of this government’s longstanding and continuing fight against insecure work. The amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act will give the Labour Hire Authority greater control of its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund within the public account. Part of these amendments is also an acknowledgement of good, honest Victorian businesses who use labour hire as an integral part of their business and do not seek to use it to undercut wages and conditions.

As a result of this, the amendments provide the authority with the ability to grant a reduction in licence fees or waive or refund fees in certain circumstances. This may be used to provide relief to labour hire providers, particularly in light of the coronavirus, or to reflect a licence-holder’s fee classification where there has been a fundamental change in the circumstances of the business beyond its control as a result of the pandemic. In saying that, fee relief will only apply to those labour hire providers that have done the right thing by their staff and are meeting requirements under the labour hire licensing scheme, such as complying with workplace health and safety laws.

In putting this important bill together there has been extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including unions, industry groups and community legal centres. The feedback the government has received has been on the lack of flexibility in the Labour Hire Licensing Act in relation to licensing fees. As a government we have listened and understood that the past year has been difficult for many businesses, hence the reforms in this bill.

These amendments seek to improve the functionality of the authority, and there is no doubt it is already playing an important role in the Victorian labour market. The Labour Hire Authority’s annual report shows that in 2019–20 the Labour Hire Authority conducted 1050 education and compliance inspections of providers under the licensing scheme, exceeding the target of 800 inspections. In 2019–20 the authority finalised 3271 licence applications, exceeding the target of 1300 applications finalised. The authority has received over three times the number of licence applications estimated from initial modelling.

Before concluding my contribution I think it is also important to talk about the wage theft amendments. As members know, Victoria was the first state to establish criminal penalties for employers who deliberately underpay or in fact do not pay their workers. Further, the Wage Theft Act 2020 establishes Wage Inspectorate Victoria as a statutory authority to investigate and prosecute wage theft offences from 1 July this year. This bill will complete the planned transfer of the inspectorate’s existing functions—ensuring compliance with Victoria’s laws relating to child employment, long-service leave and owner-drivers and forestry contractors—from the Department of Premier and Cabinet to the new authority. As I said at the outset, there are a number of other amendments as part of this very broad-ranging, very technical in nature bill.

This government has led the way when it comes to job creation in this country. In our first term, under our government in Victoria, 523 000 jobs were created. If you compare that to the four years of the previous government, just 121 000 jobs were created in Victoria over those four years. I mean, even compare that low number of jobs with our performance between September and December last year, where, as the Treasurer said in question time today, 170 000 Victorians found employment. Our unemployment rate is now 6.5 per cent, which is below the national average.

This government has been the government of job creation, and in these troubling times we find ourselves in economically as a direct result of the pandemic it is this government that has set out a path forward with a jobs plan to create 200 000 jobs by 2022 and 400 000 jobs by 2025. Victorians can
trust that this government will get Victoria back on its feet and will create new jobs for Victorians to enjoy the dignity of work, and Victorians can trust that it is this government that will give those workers the protections that they need, because when you have got a coalition government in Canberra, it is up to a strong union movement and strong state Labor governments like this one to ensure that not only are we creating new jobs for Victorians but we are also protecting their rights at work. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:20): I am pleased to rise to speak briefly on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. It is always interesting to speak on an industrial relations bill here in the Victorian Parliament given that the Victorian Parliament actually referred our industrial relations powers to the commonwealth back in the 1990s. Sometimes we hear from others opposite that that should not have happened and that we should have more control over our industrial relations framework here in Victoria, but in the 19 out of 23 years that they have been in government they have not chosen to take it back in any way, shape or form. So we get pieces of legislation like this one, where they tinker around the framework on the issues that are important to the Labor government, and I understand that, but I think as a general principle it is best left to the commonwealth to set a framework for the nation.

We do need jobs growth in this state. We saw the Treasurer talking this morning about creating jobs and the most recent statistics—I think ‘170 000 new jobs’ was his comment—but what he failed to actually outline to the house was the actual full loss of jobs since the start of the pandemic, which is well over 200 000, as was referenced in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the government’s handling of COVID and of course has been reported by the ABS over the last couple of months.

Ms Britnell interjected.

Mr D O'BRIEN: There have been significant job losses and significant losses of opportunity, as the member for South-West Coast reminds me, particularly for women and for young people in respect of jobs in this area. So when we come to legislation such as this I always look at it through the lens of probably a couple of things. One is fairness and making sure that workers are treated fairly and have access to the right treatment, to the right pay and conditions and to, where possible, secure work and all those things that are dear to the heart of the Labor Party. My criticism of the Labor Party and the Labor government on most industrial relations matters is that they only see it one way and very rarely do they see the bigger picture of making sure that employers in the private sector actually have the encouragement and the incentive to employ more people, to grow their businesses and to put more people on.

In this particular legislation I note that one aspect goes to the government’s labour hire licensing scheme. We went through quite a debate over that scheme a couple of years ago. It was introduced as a result of a parliamentary inquiry particularly looking at the horticulture and agriculture sectors but with broader application than that. I had a call—I think it was probably in 2019—from a constituent who ran a business in my electorate who said he had just got his bill. Now, I do not have the email or the details from the call in front of me, but if I remember rightly, he was going to be charged about $5000 to be registered and he was actually only marginally caught up in the labour hire licensing scheme because his business was not specifically about labour hire but he did have an element of that business. His comment to me was, ‘Where the hell did this come from and what do I get for my $5000?’ I was able to tell him, ‘Well, we didn’t support the legislation at the time, but I can’t really answer your question. I’m not sure what the advantage actually is in this scheme’.

That is the sort of thing that employers are frustrated about. When we talk about red tape, that is the sort of red tape that we are talking about. It comes into stark contrast, that issue of giving employers the confidence to go out and to expand their businesses or to start a new business in the first place and to employ people and actually provide the jobs that we want. The last couple of months indeed have seen a contrast in that question of confidence, because as I said earlier, so many jobs were lost through
COVID. That was not the fault of the government, I understand that, but what has happened since that and certainly through the second wave, which I posit was the fault of the current government, is that we have seen a loss of confidence.

The five-day lockdown that occurred in February, only a month or so ago, I do not think anyone in this place should underestimate the knock-on effects of that decision, particularly in regional areas where we were forced into a five-day lockdown despite there being no cases in regional Victoria. I have had feedback from so many businesses about the impact that that had and the lack of confidence among consumers to come in and spend. It stopped people from booking holidays, it stopped people from making big purchase decisions because they were concerned that at any given time now, and the Premier himself said it, if he gets the health advice, he will lock us down again instead of looking for a more nuanced approach, a more balanced approach, such as we have seen in New South Wales—I hate to say it again, but those are the facts—where they have managed COVID and managed to keep businesses operating and the community functioning. That in the last couple of months has been dramatic. It is certainly the feedback I get everywhere I go. I say to businesses, ‘How are you going?’ They say, ‘Look, we are starting to get back on our feet. That lockdown really knocked us around’. It is another form, if you like, of red tape.

Now, I am not suggesting for a moment that we should never have had lockdowns. I understand that was always and will always be a tool in the toolkit for dealing with COVID, but 12 months down the track we still do not have the ability for the government to manage an outbreak for our business sector and our community generally and so our schoolkids can keep going to school. It is government actions like that that really hurt our businesses. As I said, past legislation—like that we are amending here today—likewise can have that impact on businesses where they become subject to some red tape. For those particular businesses, they have the question: what are we getting from this? What is the advantage for me as a business person and for my workers to be having to pay this money to the licensing scheme?

That is a concern and one that I will continue to raise on behalf of my constituents. We need to get the balance right. The minister at the table, the Assistant Treasurer, I am sure will correct me if I get the wrong source, but I think, among others, it might have been former Prime Minister Bob Hawke who talked about growing the pie, not carving up the pie differently. I would wholeheartedly agree. That is what it should be about. We should not be just about saying, ‘There is this much wealth in the community and business people have got too much, workers get exploited and we need to give more money to the workers’. You do not make the community wealthier by taking wealth off one and giving it to another. You need to actually grow the pie, and we need legislation that will help us to encourage the private sector to grow. It is all well and good in times of crisis, like we have had in the last 12 months, to grow the public sector. We have certainly seen that here in Victoria. But my concern is that pre COVID that was the case too, with this government every year far exceeding its targets in terms of public sector growth and public sector wages growth. I think we should be putting more focus on to the private sector and making sure that they have the confidence and the opportunity to grow and create jobs for all Victorians.

I go around to businesses regularly, and I ask them about things like the licensing scheme here and other aspects of this bill—the sorts of things that state governments and federal governments get involved in. Do you want red tape? I remember talking to a very big builder in Gippsland one day who said, ‘Well, I don’t mind red tape. We understand there’s got to be rules and regulations, but it’s the unnecessary red tape—the things that are just made up somewhere deep in the bureaucracy—that we really wonder what purpose it actually serves’.

With this legislation, though, there are a number of amendments to different legislation, to different aspects of the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 and to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018 as well, which the member for Ferntree Gully has already gone through. We are not opposing this legislation, but I do make the point again that we need to get the balance right between imposing
additional red tape and taxes on business and making sure that there are jobs available for all Victorians.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (14:30): I am delighted to rise and contribute to the debate on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, and I commend the Treasurer in his capacity as Minister for Industrial Relations for bringing this to us here today. It is interesting, and I will talk a little bit about what growth of the public service means, because I think that it is actually important to acknowledge those in service to the public. In this scenario I would like to thank those who have been involved in bringing this reform to us today, because it does involve heavy lifting and work, and I would also like to thank the minister’s office for their work and responsiveness to my inquiries.

This bill amends a number of acts: the Child Employment Act 2003, the Construction Industry Long Service Leave Act 1997, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. As has been already identified by other speakers before me, it is a technical bill in nature, but it actually does represent the best of Labor. It represents the best of us and the different approach that those on this side take to responding to the needs of our community. I am really delighted that the member for Ferntree Gully did bring the former Premier Jeff Kennett into his discussion and contribution on the debate, because I will be hoping to find some time to discuss, perhaps, the performance appraisal that the former Premier has been providing just in the last 24 hours in relation to some in this chamber.

I do want to thank the member for Gippsland South for the way he talked about fairness and recognised that we are absolutely committed to fairness. But I would acknowledge that perhaps the difference is between an approach that takes benevolence and an expectation that those who have the power and the ability will provide as an act of benevolence the sorts of rights and the sorts of entitlements that they think their employees deserve, and what I think of as a rights approach, and I would contrast that with what I think of as an approach that benefits the community that I represent in that parochial way that we ought to bring to this chamber, which is a concern for the people who live in the communities we represent. Of course for me I bring to this debate a consciousness of and an approach that thinks about how the community of Cranbourne will benefit from legislation and reform that considers aspects like long service leave and the ability to accrue portable long service leave and what it means for people who are involved in insecure work and what it means for people who have little power in their relationship with their employers, especially as it relates to the burden of labour hire, when people do not take their role as employers in the way that they ought to.

I would acknowledge, of course, that while some may call it red tape, many employers welcome reform that means that they are actually acting on a level playing field and that those who are doing the wrong thing, those who are behaving in a dodgy way—‘dodgy’ is the technical term—are treated with the same fairness as others. I am proud that this bill responds to recommendations from our labour hire inquiry and that it extends the rights that currently apply to directly engaged workers under those two acts to contract workers.

I will be going to the 1990s in a minute, when the former Premier did introduce the Employee Relations Act 1992, perhaps as an act of foreplay to what was going to be the WorkChoices legislation that we saw the former Prime Minister John Howard introduce. But I recognise that this type of legislation responded to what I remember in the 1990s as contractors being very highly skilled, very wealthy people, often from what I think of as some of the leafier suburbs, and the ability for them to take their skillset around to employers, to be very well paid and to be able to not just keep food on the table, as contractors are struggling to do now, but allow their families to have perhaps a generous life—certainly one that was free from worry. I have been doing a lot of doorknocking lately and talking to a lot of contractors, especially cleaners, and I am really conscious that they do not have the power in these relationships to be able to negotiate fair wages. We need to make sure that in the legislation and the reform that we bring to this house and the work that we do here we are conscious of that, of making sure there is a balance.
I was working in the city in the 1990s when former Premier Jeff Kennett introduced the Employee Relations Act 1992. I have heard a bit of commentary from the former Premier in the last couple of days. I will say one thing for the former Premier: at least he puts his name to his comments, so that is a credit to him. He has been undertaking a few performance appraisals lately, and I think it was on the ABC this morning that he did provide a bit of a performance appraisal for some of those who are in this place. In relation to industrial relations legislation and some of those opposite he used phrases like, ‘It was politically naive’. As I said, the former Premier and member for Burwood used the sort of phrasing that perhaps is part of the vernacular that he is well known for and that does provide a bit of colour and movement to what is going on in this place at the moment, and some of the feelings that people are having about who ought take the conservative or Tory view, whether it is on WorkChoices-type legislation or some other type of legislation, and bring that here to us today.

Ms Britnell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I ask the member to come back to the bill rather than talk about the Liberal Party’s affairs, which are nothing to do with this bill.

Mr Pearson: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, it has been a wideranging debate. I have been in here today and we have had a number of contributions from a number of members. I think the member was being entirely relevant in terms of talking about issues that are relevant today as they relate to industrial relations.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Connolly): On the point of order, this is a wideranging debate and the member is being relevant.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I am actually responding directly to the member for Bentleigh and in particular to his inclination to talk about the Employee Relations Act of the 1990s and Jeff Kennett’s decision to cede industrial relations power to the commonwealth, so I am actually responding directly to the issues he raised in debate.

I will acknowledge that the member for Bentleigh raised the importance of the dignity of work and the absolute imperative to have the right to a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work, and how proud I was late last year when this government introduced a secure work pilot scheme that was really going to make a difference. It is just one more example of the sort of reform we undertake.

In the very short amount of time I have left I am going to thank the many organisations who contributed to this bill. I would like to acknowledge the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Consumer Action Law Centre and JobWatch. I would like to thank the Victorian Trades Hall Council and the Australian Services Union for the approach they have taken. On the back of yesterday’s March 4 Justice it is nice to acknowledge people like Lisa Darmanin who have been fighting for those who have been hardest hit, who are often women, and fighting for entitlements like long service leave. I would like to draw to members’ attention the fact that her significant contribution to the Victorian community meant that she was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women.

This legislation before us today, this reform, is the sort of reform that makes a difference to the lives of people who need it most, and in the context of my community, in the context of the Victorian community, rural and regional Victoria as well as metropolitan Victoria, that often means women, because this also really has a terrific impact on many people who are working in the community services sector and they are often women. They are doing a terrific job. This last couple of seconds gives me the opportunity to thank those who are in the community services sector and commend this piece of legislation and make sure it does what it needs to do.

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (14:40): I too am very pleased today to stand here and speak in support of the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Indeed it is legislation such as this that brought me to this place in the very first instance. Some of the earliest work I did representing some of the most insecure and marginalised workers in our community at the shop assistants union was certainly a formative experience for me. It is the voices of those members—in
particular young members, female members—and their experiences of insecure work that allow me to fully give my voice to this bill today.

This bill will strengthen the operation of a number of acts relating to the regulation of industrial relations in Victoria. It includes technical amendments to a number of acts that address issues identified since those acts came into effect, changes that implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work and amendments that recognise that Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body.

It is great to follow my colleagues who have talked here today about the dignity of work and the fair distribution of wealth. I also note the comments of the good member for Gippsland South, who talked about how a redistribution of wealth does not necessarily grow the pie. I guess that sums up the difference between our side and their side here today. We are not necessarily solely about growing the pie but about ensuring that the distribution of wealth is indeed a fair one, that we have wage justice for everyone in our community, whatever level of wealth they may aspire to, and that everybody has that opportunity.

When I was growing up my father had a poster on his office wall that was put together by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. It said ‘The needs of the poor are more important than the wants of the rich’. I think that is really what wage justice and indeed this bill today go to—ensuring that we have a fair and more equitable distribution of wealth in our community.

Over recent years Australia has been experiencing the lowest wages growth on record. The wage price index grew at an annual average of 2.2 per cent in the five years to December 2018, compared with an average annual growth of 3.3 per cent in the previous five years to December 2013. Low wages growth is reflected in the decoupling of wages and productivity between 2000 and 2019. Labour productivity rose 26 per cent in Australia, but real wages rose by just 13 per cent. Between 2012 and 2018 real consumer wages increased by only 1.4 per cent, or an annual average of 0.2 per cent. At the same time, labour productivity rose 7.5 per cent, or an annual average of 1.2 per cent.

Across the economy the benefits of productivity growth are not being shared with workers as equally as they were in the decades immediately following World War II. There has not been a fair distribution of wealth in our society for quite some time. There are many reasons for this, including skill-biased technology change and globalisation, but the changing nature of the workplace and the relative bargaining power of workers and employers is undoubtedly also a big part of the story. In recent decades we have seen a rise in non-standard types of employment. These include casual employment, labour hire and individual contractors and the rise of the gig economy. Some of these categories overlap, but what is clear is that a large proportion of the workforce in Victoria does not enjoy job security and that this has many negative consequences.

The rise of non-standard, insecure work contributes to the decoupling that I just referred to, where wages are lagging behind labour productivity growth. It also creates additional strain on households who have had to cope with uncertainty in the amount of work and the timing of hours. It has many negative long-term consequences, such as limiting the capacity of many households to secure a mortgage and purchase a home and make large financial decisions within their families about everything from purchases that are material in nature to things like types of education. In a conference organised by the Reserve Bank of Australia on low wages growth, Mark Wooden found:

… using panel data from the HILDA Survey, that, if we ignore the self-employed, the share of non-standard employees in total employment is markedly higher today than at the start of the millennium and all of this increase occurred since the GFC. Further, we have also established that both casual and permanent part-time employment are associated with significantly lower rates of growth in real hourly wages.

In the post-COVID economy there is no sign that these longer term trends are changing. Indeed the bounce back in employment numbers has seen casual jobs account for around 60 per cent of all wage jobs created since May, according to the Centre for Future Work. Their analysis found that between
May and November 2020 casual employment grew by 400,000, by far the biggest expansion of casual employment in Australia’s history. This is extremely, extremely concerning.

The Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work was a fantastic inquiry that brought out a lot of evidence. In October 2016 the final report of the inquiry was tabled in Parliament. This landmark report deals with a range of critically important challenges emerging in many of Australia’s workplaces. The inquiry undertook extensive consultation. It received 695 written submissions, including 91 from organisations and 604 from individuals. In addition, it heard from 221 individual witnesses during 113 hearing sessions; I think the member for Cranbourne will agree that tops some of our Public Accounts and Estimates Committee considerations.

The inquiry made a number of key findings that reinforced the need for regulatory reform in relation to labour hire. It found that while the available data in relation to labour hire is incomplete and sometimes indeed inconsistent, it was nonetheless possible to conclude that the labour hire industry has developed over the last 20 to 30 years to become a significant employer of Victorian workers and a major contributor to the Victorian economy.

Labour hire is present in almost all Victorian industries. Australia-wide data indicates that it is used most extensively in administration and support services, mining and manufacturing. And while labour hire can sometimes be a legitimate practice, allowing businesses to manage peaks and troughs in demand, there is a wide spectrum of compliance within the labour hire industry in Victoria. It is the rogue labour hire operators that warrant stronger regulatory reform. Just as there is a spectrum of labour hire operators, it is important to acknowledge that workers within this sector have a wide range of experiences. Indeed while some may want the flexibility of labour hire arrangements, it has to be stressed that for some workers labour hire arrangements are the only option open to them and they would prefer greater permanence and job security.

The majority of labour hire employees are engaged on the basis of casual employment, and these employees do not enjoy many—in some cases any—of the benefits of the national employment standards. Casual employees may also miss out on many award conditions. One of the findings of the inquiry and an important ongoing issue for policy consideration is that casual conversion clauses in awards have not been proved to be an effective mechanism to assist labour hire casuals to obtain permanent employment.

The inquiry made 35 recommendations, of which 19 were accepted in full and 14 were supported in principle. The key recommendations arising from the report that were supported include setting up a licensing scheme to regulate labour hire operators, developing a voluntary code for the labour hire industry, advocating for a national licensing scheme for operators and using government procurement to promote secure work practices as well as promoting ethical employment. The Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work also made a number of recommendations in relation to the influence of effective labour licensing systems for labour hire agencies. In recognition of the need to strengthen regulatory arrangements, this bill includes amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 that will give the authority greater control over its finances.

The provisions of the bill also provide that the assessment of annual fees can be based on the most recent four quarters of trading rather than the assessment made at the time of the licensing grant, ensuring that up-to-date figures can and will be used. The amendments also provide the authority with greater flexibility in setting licence fees. In particular the bill will give the authority the ability to grant a reduction in licence fees or waive or refund fees in certain circumstances. This may be used to provide relief to labour hire providers, particularly in light of coronavirus or to reflect a licence holder’s fee classification where there has been a change.

In the short amount of time left—I could speak forever about a bill such as this one; there is so much within it—I would just like to discuss a really pleasing element in relation to long service leave and the benefits portability scheme. The portability of long service benefits is a critical means of providing
some protection to workers in insecure work and ensuring that the protections reflect the specific regulatory arrangements in place in each industry. The bill will amend the Long Service Leave Act 2018 to extend the existing prohibition of the use of common-law contracts which abrogate employer obligations under the act to post-employment arrangements. It may have been possible for an employee to use a settlement in an unfair dismissal case to avoid paying long service leave entitlements—a cause I am familiar with—but this would not be an appropriate condition of such a settlement. I have run out of time, but I would like to commend this bill to the house. It is a bill that reflects the core values of the Labor Party.

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:50): I rise to speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. The changes to long service leave arrangements will make the system fairer and more transparent for all Victorians, employees and employers alike. The changes to the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 in the industrial relations bill are likely to save some businesses from closure and many from financial hardship—these are not my words, though I certainly agree with them. They are the words of the chief executive of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry—in fact the title of the media release was ‘Industrial Relations Bill recognises challenges for labour hire sector’—the peak employer body thanking the Andrews Labor government for making things fairer and saving businesses. They also acknowledge the consultation that took place in creating the amendments contained in this bill, consultation that took place with them, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Australian Industry Group, the Trades Hall Council, the Australian Services Union and the Consumer Action Law Centre and others. No-one was excluded from this process of ensuring fairness for all.

So what does the bill do? Well, it does a lot of things, many of them technical, to improve numerous acts, including those dealing with child employment, equal opportunity, labour hire and long service leave. Here is an example. Currently if you are directly engaged by an employer and you have a disability, you have the right to ask for your workplace to be reasonably modified to ensure that you can perform your duties. However, if you are a contract worker with the same employer, you could get the sack for asking for the modification. Same worker, same disability, same employer—now, same rights.

Our government’s labour hire and insecure work inquiry identified this issue and recommended the change we are enacting to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. I want to thank the member for Sydenham for establishing the inquiry when she was Minister for Industrial Relations back in 2015. Equality will also be enacted into the Inquiries Act 2014 so that rights which directly engaged workers get will be extended to labour hire and contract workers. I have another example: a contract worker who gives evidence to a royal commission or a board of inquiry will now be afforded the same protection as is already given to the directly engaged worker—equality of protection for telling the truth.

Fairness for workers and fairness for business: we have listened to stakeholders’ concerns around the need for flexibility, and so the annual Labor Hire Authority licensing fee will now be based on the past 12 months trading figures rather than turnover at the time a licence was granted. Furthermore, the amendments recognise the impact that the pandemic has had on some businesses, and the three-tier system will make it easier for them to understand their obligations. Another change allowing the authority to manage the moneys it receives rather than holding them in consolidated revenue speaks to our trust in their ability.

Some of my electorate of Bass is in metropolitan Pakenham, some is rural and some is in regional towns like Wonthaggi and Cowes. It does not matter what shire you are in, many did it really tough last year, and these amendments help to show businesses that we listen and we care. We will adapt to circumstances and differing needs. This bill will also allow for fees to be waived or refunded by the authority in special circumstances.

Another part of this bill amends the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, and we all learned last year that contract cleaners and security workers often work for multiple employers. They are particularly vulnerable in their conditions. Contracts finish and with them go entitlements, or they need
I also want to thank our trade union movement for their role in fighting for better conditions, safer workplaces, stronger supports and a fair and just system. In particular I thank the Australian Services Union and their members, who have been campaigning consistently for 25 years for their workers, all workers in the community services sector. When the scheme came into being in 2019 the ASU went straight out right across Victoria and held many information sessions in workplaces to explain the new system to their metro and regional members. They are there for their members always. Their campaign—and I quote from their submission of the draft regulations for the portable long service scheme:

… was prompted by the combination of the precarious nature of the work within individual community service organisations and the commitment to the sector that community service workers show.

Community services organisations have very flat structures, making promotional opportunities difficult, and funding for programs is often precarious. Due to the highly feminised workforce—around 75 per cent of the workforce is women—workers often take leave to have children or due to other family obligations. For these reasons most workers within community services organisations are not able to stay working for an employer long enough to accrue long service leave, and yet more often than not when a worker leaves one community services organisation they go to work for another one within the same sector. This bill allows the Portable Long Service Authority to reimburse employers who had paid an entitlement to a worker under the old system so the employers will not be paying entitlements twice. It also allows kept records to be expressed as parts of days or hours, because we know that cleaners and security staff often work part days. The bill allows community services sector employees to apply to be accredited for days worked when their employer has not provided the necessary information to the authority to credit them for their work.

Workers are further protected by the amendments to the Long Service Leave Act 2018. Unscrupulous employers will no longer be able to use settlement in an unfair dismissal case to get out of paying long service leave entitlements. Again, I say to this chamber: fair for the employer, fair for the worker. Honest, hardworking employers doing the right thing have nothing to fear from these changes. Equally, workers who have turned up and worked hard will be safe in the knowledge that no longer will their entitlements be denied them because their employer did not keep their records in order.

At the beginning of this speech I said that many amendments contained in this bill were technical, and this is not to imply that technicalities are less important. The establishment of the Wage Inspectorate Victoria as a statutory authority on 1 July 2021 is a prime example of this. Currently the inspectorate is part of Industrial Relations Victoria and the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Moving it outside ministerial directional control ensures that the inspectors will be independent to investigate and prosecute under the leadership of a commissioner. As an independent statutory authority, the inspectorate will have the additional powers to investigate and prosecute wage theft offences outlined in the country’s first wage theft act. I thank and acknowledge the tireless work of the current Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Economic Development, the Treasurer. The member for Werribee has been a champion for the causes of Victorian workers and businesses alike.

Finally, the amendments to the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005 will provide clarity in respect to the failure to provide both information booklets and rates and cost schedules in certain circumstances. It was always intended that failure to provide these documents would be an offence under the act, but with this amendment there will be no doubt about the penalties involved. We want all drivers to be safe on the roads and comply with the law. The independent wage inspectorate will have the power to monitor compliance.
The other side of this chamber might be cowering in the knowledge that Victorian businesses are on board with the changes to this legislation. It must rankle them to see a united workforce re-emerging from the devastation of last year and to see employers and workers working together, wanting a fairer deal for both sides and the Andrews Labor government being the one to deliver it. I totally commend this bill to the house.

Mr EREN (Lara) (14:59): I am delighted to be able to speak on this very important bill before the house. I am speaking on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, and at the outset can I congratulate the Treasurer, who is of course also the Minister for Industrial Relations, on a commendable bill. Yet again he has brought about some changes to the law of this state to make employers and employees work together to grow the economy.

When you look at our track record in terms of how we managed the economy prior to COVID, for the first time ever I think our economy was growing and was bigger than New South Wales—that was prior to COVID—and our population growth was second to none. Every year, year on year, we were getting over 150 000 people wanting to live in our state because it is a great place to work and raise a family. When you look at it now, post COVID—well, it is not post COVID just yet; we are waiting on some vaccines from the federal government—we had a tough year last year. There is no question of that. So to maintain that integrity, to maintain the strength in our economy and the growth in our population, we have got to have proper laws in place that look after those people that sometimes cannot look after themselves. When you consider some of the changes that are occurring—and we have seen a number of stories related to wage theft, it is clearly out there—we as a government need to do whatever we can to protect those vulnerable workers out there who are doing their best to keep our economy afloat.

It is unfortunate that on this very important bill when it comes to workers that only one side of the house is getting up to speak and is actually talking about some of the changes that are intended in this legislation. Though the other side have not opposed the bill, certainly they have not spoken on the bill. It is a shame really that they could not find it in their hearts to get up and speak on a bill that defends workers, but unfortunately it is not the case at this point in time. The only speaker that they have had, their lead speaker, the member for Ferntree Gully, mentioned Jeff Kennett. We remember the days of Jeff Kennett—the seven dark years that he held government. There was a mass exodus of Victorians who left the state through that period because they could not bear it any more. They could not stand it any more. Their rights were being dwindled. But since our government came into power in 1999 we have steadily recovered that reputation and of course we are now one of the strongest economies in the nation and have the biggest growth in population anywhere in the country, so I am very proud of what we are doing.

As a former delegate for the vehicle builders union back in the 1980s, I worked for Ford for a number of years and in that time I was very proud to represent hundreds of workers at Ford and represent their rights. Back then it was a bit tough. Industrial relations was pretty much one-sided, but there was a change in the law which I will never forget and I thank John Cain for that—the occupational health and safety legislation that went through this house. I was one of the first union delegates that represented workers to be given that additional power of being not only a shop steward on the shop floor but also an occupational health and safety officer when that legislation was brand new. That way we had a couple of options as representatives of workers to not only protect workers from unsafe working conditions but also defend their rights as well. I am proud of all of those Labor governments that made an impact on workers’ lives. It is important. If we want to grow the economy, it has to be conducive to a good, decent working environment where people get a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work, and that is what this bill is all about. I am so proud to be part of a government that is continuing to make sure that not only does our economy grow but it grows sustainably and grows in a way where it does not impinge upon anybody’s rights. That is what this bill is all about.

The bill will amend a number of existing acts, including the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service
Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. The amendments, while mostly technical in nature, will improve the operation of the acts as I mentioned before. Other changes will implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work and finally, amendments will be made recognising that from 1 July this year. I commend the committee’s work and I commend the government for taking on board the recommendations that came out of those committee hearings back in 2015.

Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body. That is fantastic to see and that is how it should be. The changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018 will benefit a small group of workers. The amendments to that act will also benefit employers mainly in the community services sector. The amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 will benefit businesses that have been affected by the pandemic. There are also amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and the Inquiries Act 2014 that will implement a recommendation of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire industry and insecure work. And just on the Equal Opportunity Act, it is being amended in response to recommendations of the labour hire inquiry, as I mentioned previously.

Rights under those acts that currently apply to directly engaged workers will be extended to contract workers. For example, a contract worker will be protected from detrimental actions such as dismissal if they ask their employer to modify their workplace to account for a disability. This right already applies to directly engaged employees. Obviously this is a matter of human rights. If somebody has disability and they bring it up, that should not jeopardise their work opportunities because they have brought it up.

The Inquiries Act will also be amended in response to the recommendations of the labour hire inquiry, and rights under those two acts that currently apply to directly engaged workers will be extended to labour hire and contract workers. This means that a contract worker who gives evidence to a royal commission, inquiry or formal review will enjoy protections under the act already afforded to directly engaged workers, which again makes sense because giving evidence in crucial inquiries should not jeopardise the work that those people do. Clearly this will protect those particular workers.

The amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act will give the Labour Hire Authority greater control over its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund with the public account. The amendments also permit the assessment of an annual licence fee based on the turnover of the most recent four quarters of trading rather than the turnover at the time a licence was granted. This ensures that up-to-date figures can be used.

In the short time that I have available to me, I note that other members on this side of the house have eloquently put most of the detail of this bill in Hansard, but it is about making sure that we consult widely and that we do not make up legislation as we go. We as a government are very mindful of the fact that we need to consult widely with all those people that are involved with the bits of legislation that we bring before this house. When you consider the length of consultation that has occurred in relation to this bill, I would suggest the bill is not being opposed by the opposition, even though they are not speaking on it, because of the large numbers of groupings of industry members that have actually been consulted and are supportive of the bill that is before the house. The government has consulted with stakeholders on these reforms. The groups consulted include the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Victorian Farmers Federation—they used to like the other side at one point; I am not sure if they still do—Recruitment, Consulting and Staffing Association Australia & New Zealand, the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association, JobWatch, the Australian Services Union and the Consumer Action Law Centre.

I am proud to be part of a government that is once again sticking up for workers rights, and I wish this legislation a speedy passage.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (15:09): It is with some pleasure that I rise today to speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. In reflecting on the elements to this bill but
also the events in the Parliament today, it very much occurred to me that this is in so many ways a bit of a triple-whammy day. Firstly, we had a leadership spill by the Liberal Party, where of course the Leader of the Liberal Party’s job security was very clearly challenged.

Mr T Bull: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I know that the current speaker has only just commenced his contribution, which I am sure will be excellent, but the goings-on of this morning outside of the Parliament are not relevant to the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, I ask the member for South Barwon to speak to the bill. He has only just started, so I am sure he will come back to the bill.

Mr CHEESEMAN: Indeed. Then it occurred to me of course the second element of the triple-whammy day was we had Jeff Kennett on his feet. That reminded me of the industrial relations track record of the Kennett government, where they went after the industrial relations rights of practically every single worker across Victoria by indeed referring Victoria’s industrial relations powers under the constitution to the commonwealth. Actually in so many ways Jeffrey Kennett went further. He actually marooned a bunch of workers. That was spelt out by schedule 1A, where a bunch of very insecure workers indeed lost their industrial relations rights and were marooned with very, very few rights in the 1990s. Just looking around this room I can see Labor members who will remember those particular very dark days for Victorian workers.

And then I was reminded, on this triple-whammy day, of Labor and our core business, which is of course legislating to ensure that we as a party that is interested in the working class of this state put in place legislative arrangements that make it that much easier to be a worker within this state. That is something that I have spent my working life campaigning for. That is something I and almost all of my colleagues have been passionate about throughout our working lives. I remember—in fact I was listening very intently to my friend the member for Lara—the vehicle industry. Of course the member for Lara was from the factory floor. As he very articulately put it, he was a representative of those workers from the shop floor. As an occupational health and safety rep and I think a union rep he worked on the factory floor to make sure that his colleagues were looked after, that they had strong industrial relations rights in their workplace, that they had strong wages outcomes and indeed that they were able to return home to their friends and their families every night after work safely. That was because of his efforts, those of the vehicle builders union and indeed those of many of his colleagues.

Over the last 30 years we have very much seen the nature of our work and working lives in Victoria and indeed throughout Australia change. There are many workers now that do not have the security of employment that used to be a hallmark of being a worker in this country. Indeed that was something that Jeff Kennett sought actively to do—to undermine the security of workers—much like the member for Gembrook, who was very active in undermining the job security, I noticed throughout the course of the day, of the opposition leader.

As I said, as a Labor Party, as a party that is interested in building the rights of workers, we have gone out of our way over the last 30 years to very much put in place a suite of policy reforms through inquiry, using the opportunity of being in government to make sure that people have their stories told and the opportunity provided to us as legislators to respond to that casualisation that has indeed happened throughout the Victorian and Australian economies.

I am pleased to see, actually, the member for Tarneit here, who I know is particularly passionate about owner-drivers. I think I have heard her speak on numerous occasions on the plight of owner-drivers who are often exploited by big business. This legislation of course does take a step forward in recognising owner-drivers and the challenges of owner-drivers, but it also indeed recognises that many workers, because of the nature of their workplaces, the nature of their work, miss out on some of the very, very basic industrial relations rights that most of us take for granted, such as long service leave. If you are a cook or a cleaner or any number of low-paid workers in our economy, often you do not have the security to remain in the same workplace for an extended period of time to be able to accrue...
long service leave. This is unfair for those people and we have recognised that, and by putting in place this legislative reform we have made some changes which will restore those rights to those workers.

Certainly I have had many conversations when I have been out doorknocking and talking to voters throughout my electorate. I have heard many stories now of wage theft, where we have heard of workers who have done a fair day’s work. They have toiled away appropriately, doing what they do, and they have had through either dodgy practice or deliberate action their wages in part or in full stolen from them. Often the path they have to seek that money back is more costly than the wages they have lost. That is the true nature of that problem, and as a consequence of that, those wages remain stolen. I think what we are putting in place with the wage theft mechanisms that we have sought to legislate will provide that opportunity.

We have also seen the inappropriate scourge of labour hire, where labour hire companies are set up, in effect, to remove a fundamental right for an employee to have a direct relationship with their employer. We have seen unfortunately those exploitative arrangements being inappropriately used to remove people’s job security and the opportunity for those workers to have dignity in the workplace.

I am pleased that we have put in place our labour hire arrangements, which will very much set, I think, some appropriate benchmarks to ensure that labour hire arrangements are not used to exploit vulnerable workers in this country.

As I say, today has been a triple-whammy day. We have had Jeff Kennett out reminding Victorians what the Liberal Party stands for. We have had a proposed leadership spill within the Liberal Party, and we have seen Labor stepping in with this industrial relations bill, which is very much about securing the industrial rights of Victorians. I am very pleased to commend this piece of legislation to this Parliament and to the Victorian community. We will continue as a Labor Party in government to deliver for working Victorians.

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (15:19): I too rise to speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. This bill continues to build upon our government’s strong record on IR reform in this state, because it is the Andrews Labor government that made wage theft a crime. It is our government that introduced workplace manslaughter laws, and reforms like this go to the heart of who we are. They go to the heart of Labor governments. That is why people know that when it comes to their rights at work this government, the Andrews Labor government, will always have their back.

Now, I have got to say this IR bill we are introducing is a stark contrast, let us be honest, to the one that is currently up in Canberra right now. Whilst our government is looking at protecting the rights of workers in labour hire and other vulnerable industries, the mates of those opposite in the federal government are trying to make jobs less secure and cut workers pay and conditions. It is why you will always find me having a good laugh at those opposite when they sit there and talk about how they are passionate about workers, protecting workers, protecting workers jobs and job security—most recently today in question time. It is really an affront to workers here in Victoria. I would not expect anything less from the party, and in some instances the same people, who unleashed WorkChoices on the Australian workforce, of all the things to do in the wake of a pandemic that has exposed the heart of our labour laws and the problems within them.

When I am at home with my husband I hear a lot about what the union movement is fighting for when it comes to the Morrison government’s IR bill, and none of it is very good. Now is not the time to be making things harder for workers both here in Victoria and nationwide. While we have just heard that Victoria is on track for a strong economic recovery post COVID, we cannot risk lower wages and poorer conditions stifling growth. That is not going to help anyone. So I am glad to be here debating our government’s IR bill, because this is one that will help workers when they really need it.

Some of the key changes in this bill relate to the rights of employees under labour hire companies. I do not really think it is a radical, ingenious idea that workers who a company has employed through a labour hire service should have the same rights as employees who they employ directly. We cannot
allow our workplace environment to become two tiered—I should actually say three tiered, because there is a stark difference between permanent and casual workers, as people in my electorate very much know, and the rights that they have—between direct and indirect workers. That is what this is all about: direct workers who are employed by a company and indirect workers contracted through a labour hire firm.

That is why our government launched an inquiry into labour hire and insecure work and we saw firsthand last year how insecure work allowed the virus to sweep through workplaces. You only had to look to Wyndham and the types of jobs that people in my community worked in. They were casual jobs, insecure jobs, and the virus swept through their workplaces, whether they were factory workers or abattoir workers—the list goes on. We have learned about the abuses and the risks associated with labour hire companies and insecure work, and that is what this bill is looking to change. It is going to do that by making sure that labour hire workers have the same rights under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. Most notably, labour hire employees will be protected against discrimination on the basis of employment activity, such as if they make a request relating to their entitlements as an employee. Nobody should be treated unfairly for asking questions about their employment arrangements, whether it is about their pay or their conditions, and labour hire workers should not be any different.

That is why this bill will clarify that workplace requirements to reasonably accommodate employees with a disability also extend to labour hire workers. We talk a lot in this place about better protections, better reform and better policy and legislation for vulnerable Victorians. Well, this is it again. We are also going to be protecting them from adverse actions just for appearing before an inquiry or a royal commission. It is absolutely disheartening to hear that workers were in fact afraid of coming to tell us, to tell our government, what is wrong with the system that they are part of because they were worried that they might suffer retaliation from their employer. It is bad enough that the inquiry had to recommend that this change should be made. Now, for those labour hire workers, including the ones that live in my own community, I say to you: this bill will change your life, it will change the way you work, it will change your rights.

Another key change we are making with this bill is related to portable long service entitlements, particularly for those working in the community services sector. We know that community sector workers do an incredible job, whether they are the receptionist at a community centre or they are managing the place. Under the changes in this bill the Portable Long Service Authority (PLSA) will be empowered to reimburse employers in the community sector who pay entitlements to employees on long service leave. I remember, I think it was in the middle of last year, that I was contacted by a constituent in Hoppers Crossing. This lovely lady was a local, and she managed a local community centre in my electorate. She raised with me her concerns about the regulations that were passed in relation to portable long service leave. In particular she was really concerned about the implications of paying the cost of an employee’s long service leave while covering the costs of her replacement. I have to say it is somewhat understandable. We understand these concerns. Small community centres—and there are a lot in my electorate—are not necessarily flowing in cash, and many cannot afford both leave requirements and the cost of a replacement. In some cases this ends up hurting the people who are supposed to receive help from this scheme. Well, I am pleased to say that this bill will clarify that for small community centres, they are going to be reimbursed for the cost of their employees’ long service leave.

Now, employers will also have greater flexibility in how they report the days worked by an employee to the PLSA, as they can now express this in part days or in fact hours. On top of this, where a community sector employer has not reported days worked to the PLSA, the employee will now be able to do this as well. This is going to help reduce the burden of record keeping for community organisations. I think some of these changes get the balance right, because we cannot lose important community services and it is important that those people working in the sector have the right to leave entitlements, and that is exactly what this bill does.
Another change, as the member for South Barwon talked about, that is very close to my heart is in relation to owner-drivers. It was a great pleasure of mine to debate the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Amendment Bill 2019, and I am pretty sure it was one of the first bills that I debated and contributed to in this Parliament after being elected. As someone for whom the Transport Workers Union has been such a present part of my family’s life, I am very proud that we have strengthened these laws for owner-drivers working in the transport industry. That is why I am delighted to see that we are strengthening them even further by clarifying that non-compliance with obligations to supply further information is indeed an offence. This will give hardworking owner-drivers—and there are plenty out in Tarneit, let me tell you—certainty that they can get the fair and safe working conditions that they too deserve.

This bill truly reflects our Labor government’s commitment to protecting workers. It is who we are; it is in our DNA. And the changes in this bill will deliver stronger protections in the workplace and better outcomes for some of our most vulnerable workers. Unlike those opposite, the party of WorkChoices, we are not interested in undermining workers or in undermining superannuation, collective bargaining or working conditions, and as we speak the Senate is debating a horrendous IR bill that will have devastating outcomes for Victorian workers. So let us show them what an IR bill should look like, and that is precisely why I commend this bill to the house.

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (15:29): It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 and to follow the hardworking member for Tarneit. This past year has been one of the toughest in recent memory when it comes to the wellbeing and livelihoods of Victorian workers and our business community. The pandemic has shone a light on the harsh realities still facing too many Victorian workers, whether that be the precarious nature of insecure work, the imbalances in pay and conditions between segments of our labour markets or the pressure points in our industrial system. It has reinforced what we know to be true—that safe, secure and sustainable employment is critical for the economic and social wellbeing of Victorians. As we continue to steam ahead with our economic recovery in Victoria and our plan to create 400 000 jobs by 2025, it is more important than ever that we build on our strong track record of delivering workers protections. It is more important than ever that we do what we can to make sure that the jobs being created are fairer and more secure than ever before.

This bill introduces a number of amendments to seven different acts in order to enhance workers rights and provide financial relief to employers who are doing the right thing. I will get to the detail of these changes in a moment, but before I do I want to say how immensely proud I am to be a member of a party and a government which takes these issues seriously. Here we are in the midst of a global pandemic which has tested us in so many different ways, impacting people’s lives, livelihoods, mental wellbeing, physical wellbeing and social connections, yet here we are seizing this opportunity which is before us not only to rebuild but to reimagine how we do things. Never before has it been more important or more apparent that it is Labor governments that have fought and continue to fight for robust social safety nets, for strong employment rights, for secure work, for freedom from discrimination, for equity and for dignity. We will never stop in that mission, and that is why in the face of the recovery we see before us we also see an opportunity to make our state stronger and fairer.

Here in Victoria we are leading the way when it comes to improving protections for workers and achieving a fair balance between the interests of workers and employers. Successive Labor governments have consistently initiated numerous reforms that send a strong, clear message that we are a government that values and protects workers. Whether it be occupational health and safety, compulsory super, family violence leave, portable long service leave or holding labour hire firms to account, we have been delivering for the people of Victoria. Over the last two years alone I have had the honour of speaking on a number of bills that strengthen workers protections and which have been warmly welcomed by my community, including local businesses. This includes our historic workplace manslaughter laws, the introduction of our provisional payments scheme supporting workers’ mental...
health, and criminalising wage theft. At every step and every opportunity we have shown Victorian workers that they are valued and that they deserve dignity and security.

Sadly there are those across the political divide—a divide which seems to just keep getting wider and wider—who have consistently sent a very different message to our workers. At every step and at every opportunity there are those who have stood in the way of much-needed reform. They have tried to tear down unions and undermine collective bargaining. They have sought to weaken workers protections and peddled a false narrative that the interests of workers and employers is a zero-sum game. It is not. A fair and safe working environment is good for everyone; it is good for workers, and it is good for businesses.

This bill introduces a number of amendments that relate to workplace protections, entitlements and obligations. Amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and Inquiries Act 2014 will implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, extending the same protections afforded to direct employees to contract workers and to labour hire staff. For example, the changes to the Equal Opportunity Act will ensure contract workers will be protected from detrimental action like dismissal if they ask their employer to modify their workplace to account for a disability, and changes to the Inquiries Act will mean that a contract worker who gives evidence to a royal commission will enjoy the same protections as ongoing workers—pretty common sense.

The rise of insecure work in Australia is a troubling reality. Australia has the third-highest rate of insecure work among developed countries, and we know that people in insecure work are often among the lowest paid. We know that they do not benefit from the same protections as workers in full-time or even permanent part-time work. We know that insecure work disproportionately impacts women, and we know that they were the hardest hit when coronavirus reached Australian shores. In my community of Northcote, this was felt deeply by our hospitality, retail, creative industries, education and training sectors. Many watched in disbelief as the Morrison government excluded tens of thousands of people from JobKeeper in a fundamental lack of understanding about the realities of modern work, leaving countless workers and businesses in an impossible situation. Now, as the end date looms, many are anxious about what the future holds, as they are just starting to get back on their feet. I think we got a pretty clear hint, though, with the federal government’s latest industrial relations bill, which seeks to undermine wage theft protections and does nothing to address insecure work. What a message to send to our businesses during one of the most difficult periods they have ever faced.

In contrast, this bill is delivering sensible, tangible, albeit quite technical, amendments to better support workers and businesses. Changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018 improve our fantastic portability scheme for the contract cleaning, community services and security sectors. Many of these workers have been on the front line in responding to the pandemic, and I am pleased to see improvements for these sectors on the way. With almost 10 per cent of the Northcote electorate also listing their occupations as community and personal service workers, I know this will be welcomed by Northcote locals.

Amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 will provide increased flexibility and fee relief for providers impacted by the pandemic, provided they are doing the right thing and meeting requirements like work, health and safety laws. And finally, amendments will be made recognising that from 1 July this year, the Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body, following on from our nation-leading Wage Theft Act 2020.

The pandemic has brought into stark relief the challenges facing workers in Victoria. It has highlighted the dedication and value of our cleaners, community services workers, early childhood educators and countless others who have been on the front line but who are also among the most impacted by insecure work and the least protected when it comes to our industrial system. No other party will stand up for these workers. Labor’s track record is clear, and our commitment has been demonstrated.

Our secure work pilot scheme will provide up to five days of sick and carers pay at the national minimum wage for casual or insecure workers in priority industries. The two-year pilot will ensure these workers...
can access sick pay when they are unwell and carers pay when they need to take time to care for someone else. Critically, as we saw too often during the pandemic, it will mean locals will not have to choose between putting food on the table and keeping their co-workers safe. We are also supporting secure employment through initiatives like an expanded Jobs for Victorians and the Working for Victoria program, directly creating sustainable opportunities for those who need a helping hand.

In the 2020–21 Victorian budget we saw a record $619 million invested in providing jobseekers impacted by the pandemic with the information, advice and support they need to get back to work. This boost will create more than 10 000 wage-supported jobs in over two years in Victoria. Critically, it includes $150 million focused on getting women back to work, particularly women over the age of 45—a cohort that we know was one of the hardest hit by the pandemic and that faces significant barriers to re-entering the workforce. The fantastic work of Working for Victoria is also making a real difference, with more than 12 000 jobs created since its launch in April last year. And in my home electorate of Northcote, the Working for Victoria program has been a huge success, creating hundreds of new jobs and supporting some great local organisations along the way. Most notably, most recently, it includes social enterprises as well. So this is a bill that we should all get behind. It is about our economic recovery and supporting businesses and workers, and I commend it to the house.

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (15:39): I rise to also put forward my contribution on the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2021, and I thank the Treasurer in his capacity as the Minister for Industrial Relations for bringing this bill before us because it does go to our constant effort to protect the rights and the ability of every worker to just get treated fairly. It is a fairly simple concept but something that we continue to work on, and this bill, although rather technical in nature, definitely contributes to that.

This year, obviously with the pandemic over the last 12 months, has shone a bright light, as my colleagues have stated, on some of the cracks in our industrial relations frameworks—just the fact that more often being in insecure work, especially over the last 12 months, gives people rise to make choices about whether they will potentially turn up to work sick in order to put food on the table or potentially stay home and benefit others. That is a very difficult choice for a lot of Victorians.

This government, however, will continue to lead the way in developing initiatives to protect workers. This bill will allow us to continue to grow and strengthen our industrial sector, supporting a strong economic recovery. We are at the beginnings of it, but I think the signs early on are very good. It just shows the strength and the dedication from the Premier and the whole government. Our jobs plan, which was announced in 2020–21, does show just that, ensuring not only a job but certainty and security for Victorians and families.

We are talking about labour hire in this bill and strengthening some of the protections for workers, but I just want to add in my own experiences from labour hire. Over the years I have had experiences on both sides of that equation. Early in my career in IT I did a lot of contract work. You would go through personnel companies—labour hire companies, effectively—and work three months here, three months there. That is why I wanted to do it; for me it was a way of doing a bit of that and doing a bit of music. I thought I was going to be a rockstar. Obviously that did not work out. That is probably a good thing for everyone. But it was good work, and for me it was okay. I could get the work; that was good. Those opportunities are still available.

When I was running my own business I had limited-time projects. We would get a project with a client; it would be a three-month or a six-month project. You would have a bit of work, and given the nature of a very small IT firm you would find someone to fill that gap. You would use them for as long as you could, and you would pay them the appropriate rates and give them work. Everyone wins—at least that was the plan. I and my business partner made the decision over the last number of years that when we needed to use contracted labour or labour hire we would try to get some graduates who otherwise had not got a leg up. Over the last couple of years—before I was here, obviously—I think there were two particular workers who come to mind that we employed. Both of these guys had
been out of work since uni for about 12 to 18 months. They just could not get that first foot in the door. They worked with us for about three to six months on different occasions; both of them got a job. So labour hire can work for people, but obviously both of these young people wanted secure work. They wanted permanent work. That should be a no-brainer.

A bill like this, strengthening protections for labour hire, is very timely in a year when insecure work has had that shining light on it. I note also in today’s news that there has been a decision by HungryPanda, one of the gig tech companies. Two drivers who took it to HungryPanda have won their jobs back after being treated unfairly. They struck a deal with the company. So that is good news that we have gig tech companies coming to the party, but it is only a start.

What concerns me—I will give you a hypothetical. Obviously with a tech background I can imagine the uses of the internet. We all know Uber and other companies who provide mostly transport at this time. And just on the HungryPanda thing, a big shout-out to Transport Workers Union Australia, Michael Kaine and the team there and also to TWU Victoria, John Berger and his whole team, who are doing a lot of work for our drivers. But I also want to say to everyone else in every other industry: if you can get accreditation for your work—whether that be a certificate III, a diploma or in-house skills—get something that says you are accredited for this. We already know labour hire companies now will shuffle people in and out in security, hospitality and a whole heap of industries. I think with the work that this government is doing we are trying to rein that in so that the dodgy operators are prevented from doing that. That work will continue—I have no doubts.

But think of it this way: the gig tech companies currently take a driver and make them an entrepreneur. Some of them might do well, but some of them do not, and there is a lack of protection there. I just ask you to consider: what if the next Uber or Deliveroo—whatever they are—is shop assistants at supermarkets? What if the next one is nurses? What if the next one is waitstaff or security guards? I would say to the labour hire companies, especially the good ones—and I have dealt with good ones; they are out there and they are probably the majority—be aware, be on our side. If we protect workers and we make this industry work and it is a win-win all round, then this is a good thing. If we let this go rampant—and I am concerned about the federal industrial relations laws that are being debated at the moment—it will not just be logistics and transport where everyone is turned into an entrepreneur; it will be everyone else, and the middle people will be taken out of it because the big tech, the big corporations, can make more money that way.

Now, I have got no problem with people making money—I am all for businesses being profitable—but we have got to add to society. Businesses have to have that social construct, that social agreement, with all of us. We all have a duty—that is employees, employers, big corporates, small businesses—to add to our society. I am concerned—and I do not think I am alone—with the way our gig economy is being exploited. As I said, lots of people in the creative industries were back in the day, and still now are, used to gigs. They are used to turning up, getting a little bit of money and not knowing where the next job is going to be. A lot of creative people just accept it. Now we are seeing that transport is another industry where that is at danger of being accepted. I commend the work that the TWU is doing to prevent that from happening. I commend the work that this government and the Treasurer are doing to prevent that from happening. I will stand with them, as I know all of my colleagues on this side will, to protect every worker in this state. That is why I commend this bill to the house.

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (15:49): Quite often I apply a little mantra to myself about legislation and about associated things. I apply the mantra of: is it fair, is it productive and is it compassionate? And I am always conscious of the fact that you do not always get those commodities in equal balance—that if something is compassionate it may be less productive, that if something is really productive it may be less than fair, and so on. So it is always a bit of a challenge then when we take up legislation of this kind. I am pleased to speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, and I am proud to be part of a government that takes its obligations to protect workers seriously, in stark contrast to those opposite, who regrettably voted against protecting the rights of workers in the labour hire industry.
The bill is needed as it strengthens a number of laws to provide financial relief for employers and vitally maintain strong protections for workers. The bill amends a number of existing acts: the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. I would like to say just a few words about some of those.

As will be seen, the amendments are mostly technical and improve the operation of these acts. But they always say, don’t they, that the devil is in the detail. That is why even though it can be pretty heavy going—dare I say boring?—to be going through some of this administrative stuff, if you do not, you tend to pay for it later on in one way or another, so I think these things are really worthwhile. So when you hear the opposition say, ‘Oh well, that’s too costly’ or, ‘This is going to cost too much to do this and do that’, that sometimes can be the riposte of someone who just does not want to move at all, so they simply fall back on, ‘It’s too costly’, ‘It’s too cumbersome’ or, ‘There is too much red tape’ and so on. You have got to look at it for what it is. Other changes will put in place important recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work. Finally there are amendments that recognise that from 1 July this year Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body.

Let me outline then the amendments that are being made to these acts. The amendments made to the Equal Opportunity Act are in response to recommendations of the government’s inquiry into labour hire and insecure work. Rights under the Equal Opportunity Act currently applying to directly engaged workers will be extended to contract workers. To do so is simply the right thing to do. For example, a contract worker will now be protected from prejudicial action such as dismissal if they request their employer make reasonable modifications to their workplace to accommodate a disability. Similarly, the bill amends the EO act to protect contract employees from employment discrimination on the basis of their employment activity; for example, should the employee make a reasonable request for information as to their employee entitlements. Directly engaged employees already have this right, and the Andrews government now safeguards the position for the many non-direct employees.

The Inquiries Act will also be amended in response to recommendations of the labour hire inquiry. Labour hire and contract workers will now receive rights under the Inquiries Act equal to those of directly engaged workers. This means that in the future a contract worker giving evidence to a royal commission or to an inquiry or formal review will have the protections under the act that are already applicable to directly engaged workers, essentially that they cannot be injured in their employment by virtue of their participation before such an inquiry or royal commission. Again, it is suggested that any fair-minded person would see this as an overdue provision.

The Labour Hire Licensing Act amendments give the Labour Hire Authority more autonomy over its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund within the public account. It should be pointed out that those opposite voted against the Labour Hire Licensing Act, choosing not to support the government’s laws protecting workers from exploitation in the labour hire industry, once again showing that they cannot really be trusted when it comes to safeguarding the rights of Victoria’s workers.

By ensuring that up-to-date business turnover figures can be used, the amendments will allow the assessment of an annual licence fee based on the labour hire business’s turnover over the most recent four quarters of trading, rather than the turnover at the time the licence was granted. The need for an up-to-date assessment approach is vividly illustrated by the coronavirus experience felt by so many employers. As a practical measure, the amendments contained in the bill provide the Labour Hire Authority with the capacity to vary, waive or refund the fees otherwise payable by labour hire providers. While not applying to regular business fluctuations, the authority will now have the ability to grant relief to labour providers where there has been a change like COVID-19 affecting the business circumstances and which is beyond their control. Such measures reflect the even-handed nature of the bill’s enactments.
It will be recalled that the Long Service Benefits Portability Act provided the opportunity for many workers to qualify for long service leave when they would previously have been denied such leave by their employment discontinuing or otherwise not qualifying. Under the bill, the LSBP act will be varied to permit regulations to be made authorising the Portable Long Service Authority to reimburse employers in the community services sector where an employer has already paid a long service leave entitlement to an employee. This is just one example of some of the practical things that are there. It is not just some simplistic sort of application, if you like. It has been well thought through. There already exists a reimbursement power for the authority in relation to federal awards, enterprise agreements and to the contract cleaning and security sectors. The bill ensures employers do not have to make a payment twice in respect of the same period of employment and, it should be noted, employers can still apply for reimbursement if they had paid an employee under one of the relevant industrial instruments. Again, it can be seen that this is a government interested in fairness, both to employees and employers. Where the employer of a community services sector employee has not advised the authority of days worked, the employee may apply to the authority to be credited for the relevant period.

The bill also contains amendments affecting worker and employer representation on the long service governing board. Presently the act provides for a single employee representative and a single employer representative. Under the bill’s amendments, there will be three representatives nominated by the employers for a covered sector and three nominated by the respective unions. In addition to the non-voting registrar, there will be two further independent board members, who will serve as chair and deputy chair. The appointments will be made by the minister, who is required to ensure that the board is made up by those with a mix of relevant skills and experience.

So the bill reflects well Labor’s dedication to balanced industrial legislation, where equity and good conscience are given full effect. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (15:59): It is a great pleasure to rise and to make a contribution on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, almost as great a pleasure as it is to follow the warrior for workers, the member for Hawthorn.

If I could just say that as well this bill is playing a kind of omnibus role in strengthening a number of different acts to provide financial relief not only for employers but maintaining strong protection for workers as well. In terms of the acts that will be amended by this bill, there is the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018—which I would like to go into a bit more detail about later—the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005.

I of course would like to commend the Treasurer in his capacity as Minister for Industrial Relations, and his hardworking staff as well as the department, for putting together this bill to make things better for all Victorians. Of course Labor is proud—very, very proud—to be the party for workers. We deliver protections for workers on many, many fronts. At the federal level we were not the party of WorkChoices—that very, very regressive act that put workers rights back for many, many years. We certainly were not the party at state level that introduced move-on laws and used them when workers did decide to strike, just like those workers over in Clayton South at McCormick Foods at the moment who have been out on strike for nearly three weeks because they had the gall to ask for a 3 per cent pay rise. If those move-on laws were still in place, it would be a very real thing that those workers, firstly, would not be able to collectively bargain properly for a 3 per cent wage rise and then go out on strike. They would not have the ability to be on strike to get that wage rise. Can I just say, this is a wage rise they have not received for five years even though that company has been very, very profitable in that period of time. It is an absolute shame. But protecting workers is what we do on this side of house, and supporting workers is a part of our DNA. It is in this house where bills are introduced, including the bills for the Labour Hire Licensing Act and the Long Service Benefits Portability Act.
As I said, the amendments are mostly technical in nature, but the changes will improve the operation of those aforementioned acts. Other changes will implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work. Final amendments will be made recognising that from 1 July this year Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body. The changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act will benefit the small group of workers, and amendments to that act will also benefit employers, mainly in the community services sector. The amendments to the labour hire act will also benefit businesses that have been affected by the pandemic, and the amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act and Inquiries Act implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, as I said.

In terms of the labour hire licensing scheme, I thought it might be interesting just to reflect on the introduction of that scheme. It actually came into effect in November 2019. As for statistics up to November of last year, I think it is really interesting to note that some 3800 labour hire companies were licensed in that year. Now, that shows a couple of things. It shows the actual explosion of labour hire companies—the main employer of blue-collar work in the state—and it shows just how many have been registered by this new body. To be registered by this body you have to demonstrate compliance with existing workplace laws, including taxation, superannuation, occupational health and safety, workers compensation, workplace, and immigration laws. The great thing about that scheme is that it is a scheme that requires ongoing compliance. So to be able to maintain your right to run a labour hire agency you must maintain that licence, which you evidence with annual reporting obligations.

So as well as there being some 3800 licences that in effect have been granted in that period of time, in that 12 months, the authority also uncovered many instances of non-compliance with relevant workplace laws. For all the fuss that was made that that scheme should not have been implemented, it actually shows that there was a real need for this scheme and that its time had well and truly come in its introduction. So those instances of non-compliance have resulted in conditions being imposed on labour hire licences or investigative action to determine whether a refusal to grant, suspend or cancel a licence is appropriate. Up until that period of November last year, in the first 12 months of the authority, some 27 licences have had to have conditions placed on them—27 rogue agencies that otherwise would have been able to operate unfettered in this state. I am very happy to say not only that the authority maintains its vigilance and reports those companies for the safety of workers and keeps a record of it on its website but that they are very easily seen if you go there.

This government is also one of consultation. When it comes to implementing reforms, indeed when it comes to implementing bills which make things more efficient, we do not do so without speaking to and consulting with all relevant key stakeholders. It is very good that the government has indeed had a consultation with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Australian Industry Group; the Victorian Farmers Federation; the Recruitment, Consulting and Staffing Association Australia & New Zealand; of course the mighty Victorian Trades Hall Council; the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association; JobWatch; the Australian Services Union; and the Consumer Action Law Centre.

In terms of the amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act, the amendments will give the Labour Hire Authority greater control over its finances. It will allow them to establish their own trust fund within the public account. The amendments also permit the assessment of an annual licence fee based on the turnover of the most recent four quarters of trading rather than the turnover at the time a particular licence was granted. This ensures that up-to-date figures can be used. In terms of that act, coalition members of this Parliament did vote against that Labour Hire Licensing Act, and that really did show their true colours, turning their backs on Victorian workers. Whilst the Liberals and Nationals voted against these laws, our government has taken very strong action to clean up the industry.

This bill is a very good bill. It reflects some very hard work by the department, by the office of the Treasurer and by the Minister for Industrial Relations. I support the bill, and I wish it a very speedy passage through the house. I commend the bill to the house.
Mr TAK (Clarinda) (16:09): I am delighted to add my voice to those speaking on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Furthermore, it is always good to follow the hardworking member for Narre Warren South, who has a union background. He was with the National Union of Workers, which I am very fond of.

There are some largely technical but important measures that will make amendments to a number of existing acts to improve their operation. One of these acts is the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018. This piece of legislation is really relevant to many of my constituents, and that is why I am very pleased to be able to speak directly after the hardworking member for Narre Warren South. This bill here today will implement the recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, an inquiry that was also a very relevant process for many of my constituents.

It was some time ago, back in September 2015, that the government announced an inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work in Victoria. There were almost 700 submissions received, and many of those submissions were from workers and stakeholders from the south-east. At the time I was a councillor with the City of Greater Dandenong, and I was very happy to see that public hearings took place in Dandenong. That process involved many of my constituents once again. The inquiry was asked to investigate the practices of labour hire companies, insecure work, sham contracting and the abuse of visas to avoid workplace laws and undermine minimum employment standards.

Clarinda is a particularly culturally diverse electorate, and unfortunately it was identified that workers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by labour hire agencies, and many examples of those were exposed. Just on the outskirts of the Clarinda district, early each morning you can go and catch a stream of people moving in minivans and buses transporting agricultural workers to farms in the outer suburbs. They travel all around Springvale, Springvale South and Keysborough picking up workers and heading off to the farms in the food bowl. I would just like to add that in my early time here in Australia during summer school I used to pick strawberries and all of that. It is a very good memory, and I know that other members in this place have also spent some time during the summer doing this. It is a fond memory, but we did not know that there was such exploitation in terms of especially overseas workers.

It has been estimated that there are up to 100 000 undocumented workers in Australia, many of them from South-East Asia, and many of them work seasonally in Victoria. So again I would like to commend the United Workers Union, who have done a tremendous job of organising many of the farm workers that live in my electorate, helping them to raise their voices and raise the issue of underpayment and report instances of wage theft and, importantly, helping those workers collectively bargain for better wages and working conditions. I would also like to take the opportunity to quickly mention the United Workers Union members at McCormick Foods in Clayton South. The workers there I have seen every day for the last three weeks.

Mr Maas interjected.

Mr TAK: Yes, three weeks—striking in front of McCormick and along that strip. These workers have not had, like the member for Narre Warren South said, a pay rise since 2016, and all the while McCormick has been turning a profit. McCormick Foods is a multinational company that makes herbs and spices as well as dipping sauces used by fast-food chains, including KFC, Red Rooster, McDonald’s and Hungry Jack’s. It also supplies produce like jelly and mustard to the major supermarkets. As mentioned, these workers have gone five years without a pay rise and are now facing a pay cut and a cut to conditions under a proposed new agreement. That is completely unacceptable. During the pandemic many food and manufacturing workers worked incredibly hard and continued to show up despite the risk of infection in order to keep our society and economy going, so I fully support the workers at McCormick in their fight for a fair deal and I share my solidarity and very much respect the dedication and commitment that they are showing there on Fairbank Road in Clayton South.
Turning to the bill, in terms of the changes to the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the amendments will give the Labour Hire Authority greater control over its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund within the public account. The amendments also permit the assessment of an annual licence fee based on the turnover of the most recent four quarters of trading rather than the turnover at the time when the licence was granted. This ensures that up-to-date figures can be used. The amendments further provide the authority with the ability to grant reductions in licence fees or to waive or refund fees in certain circumstances. This is to be used to provide relief to labour hire providers, particularly in light of the coronavirus, or to reflect the licence-holder’s fee classification where there has been a change in circumstances of business beyond its control. These changes will help to improve the operation of the act. Further, there are other relevant changes to the Inquiries Act 2014. It will be amended to respond to the recommendations of the labour hire inquiry in relation to rights under the act that currently apply to directly engaged workers. These will be extended to labour hire and contract workers.

Talking about consultation, there has been extensive consultation undertaken. This has included consultation with stakeholders such as the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Recruitment, Consulting and Staffing Association Australia & New Zealand, the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the Australian Services Union and the Consumer Action Law Centre, so there has been a vast range of consultation with stakeholders.

These are positive changes. They have broad support, and I am so happy to support them here today. I believe in a fair go for all, and I am very proud to be part of a government that is committed to ending the widespread abuse and exploitation of workers, whether that be by invisible labour hire bosses, through wage theft or otherwise. For that reason I thank the Minister for Industrial Relations and Treasurer, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (16:18):** It gives me great pleasure to join the debate on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. There have been some fantastic speakers in the chamber before me, and I note a number of the people in the chamber—and others who spoke before—have held very responsible positions with a number of trade unions. I see the member for Narre Warren South, who spoke about issues in the food industry in his region. As a former state secretary of his union he knows full well how important industrial regulation is. The same with—just a few seats up—the member for Melton, the esteemed former secretary of the Ambulance Employees Australia Victoria, which represents our fabulous paramedics, who had such a hard time during those dark years between 2010 and 2014 when their health and safety was really compromised and their work and conditions were not effectively recognised for the dangerous work that they do.

I know the member for Mount Waverley has also done a lot of work over the years with the Transport Workers Union. I am a great supporter of the Transport Workers Union particularly as I have so many people working in the transport and logistics sector in my electorate, and also the proximity to Melbourne Airport means that there are many TWU workers there. It came up in my Facebook feed earlier today that the Transport Workers Union had a win against HungryPanda, and I really want to commend the Transport Workers Union and Michael Kaine. He has made a lot of good movies, but he is making a real name for himself now and making a huge difference in heading up the Transport Workers Union of Australia and really taking on the tech companies, the Ubers of the world. They had a great win today against HungryPanda, and that came up in my feed. Michael and the state secretary, John Berger, have been very prominent in identifying the very real—it is not just pay—conditions and dangerous conditions that have caused the death of particularly those delivering food and parcels, because they are just not given enough time to do their jobs.

I say to everyone: in a sense I am almost fortunate. Some of the people in my electorate during lockdown said, ‘Oh, God, we can’t get Uber Eats’, or they could not get a number of other of those type of delivery services in the more far-flung parts of my electorate, but I would say they are absolutely the lucky ones and the businesses are the lucky ones, particularly in Hurstbridge. Most of these rogue ratbag operators that treat their workers appallingly and say that they are contractors when
they are demonstrably not also take 30 to 40 per cent of the cut. So I say to all my constituents, ‘Don’t blinking use those cowboys, just ring up your local Chinese’. I like to ring Makan District direct, the Malaysian in my electorate, or any of the Indians. I am lucky I can walk around the corner—unless I am feeling particularly lazy—to a great range of food providers in my electorate. I choose to do that, and I encourage everyone to do that.

Even with what we have seen with the recovery of hospitality but also the travel industry I always encourage people, ‘Don’t go online, you’ll have less protection’. When you look at the travel agencies who are on their knees, they have had almost no support from the federal government. But I know that some of my constituents that have been stuck overseas or have been trying to get back for months have actually been able to save their money and rebook again when they have used an agent. I think they will treat you fairly. They employ their staff and pay them reasonably, although they are going to be stuck at the end of the month when JobKeeper ends.

I was reflecting on what the member for South Barwon said in his contribution when he referenced the Kennett era. I was the vice-president of the public service union from 1993 to 1996. I will say that was a shocking career move if you wanted to remain a public servant, because anyone who was active in the union in that terrible period was persona non grata. Really your promotion prospects were stymied. The horrendous Employee Relations Act 1992 meant that public servants could be fined and jailed if they actually told the person sitting next to them what they were paid. It was a dreadful, dreadful period.

We had managers that were emboldened and thought that they could tear down union notices that were on noticeboards. People were sworn at when they tried to participate in a ballot as to whether or not they would have a union ballot. There were women at Consumer Affairs Victoria, I remember, on the phone lines there. A senior manager who had come from the justice department was a bit like what some of the Liberals have described that faction in Canberra as—you know, the big swinging things starting with D. I like the cartoon that says ‘big swinging chicks’. But yes, this guy was a bit of a big swinging D, and he just roared out at these women in consumer affairs who were coming up and just voting yes or no as to whether they wanted to be part of a collective agreement. He roared out the door in a public sector workplace and said, ‘Effing Labor Cs’. That was the kind of workplace environment it was, and we used to have to put our union bulletins on the back of the dummy doors, because otherwise they would be torn down.

The member for South Barwon, when I first met him, was a young lad working for what was then the State Public Services Federation, now the CPSU, of which I was the vice-president, and I was really glad that we were able to employ young, passionate people like the member for South Barwon who really stood up for workers. I also remember particularly being involved in a workplace dispute, which was what then led to Jeff Kennett sending the powers off to the federal jurisdiction and marooning hundreds of thousands of workers in a state system that did not agree anymore. When Mr Kennett could not get his way, the child protection workers, most of whom were women, who had never been on strike before in their lives—never even contemplated it—went on strike. I cannot remember if it was for 20 days or 24 days. Unless there was an agreement under the Employee Relations Act 1992 between the employee representation, the union and the employer, you could not have arbitration. So these women went on strike for that long, and it actually was not about their pay and conditions, it was about trying to keep children safe. I remember Tandberg doing a fantastic cartoon of Kennett at the football at the MCG roaring out, ‘Kill the umpire!’ because that is what he thought about arbitrators being able to arbitrate in an industrial dispute.

We take an entirely different approach. I am pleased to see these mainly technical amendments to a number of acts in the bill before the house, and it is appropriate that they should come before the house in an omnibus bill. The acts that are being amended are the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. I particularly want to commend cleaners, who were so pivotal as frontline
workers, as security workers and others have been, during the pandemic. We are a government that wants to extend the portability of long service leave to those workers, because many times they are with the same company but just in different workplaces.

We are a government that always will nail our colours to the mast. I really hope the federal government are going to rethink their proposed industrial relations changes, because now is not the time to be making changes—even the Reserve Bank of Australia has said that. Thank you to the public servants, the ministerial staff and the minister, who have worked so hard on this bill. I commend it to the house.

Sitting suspended 4.28 pm until 5.02 pm.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (17:02): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Can I begin by thanking and acknowledging the Treasurer, the Minister for Industrial Relations, for his work on this important bill. The bill will amend a number of existing acts. These are the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. When we look at all of these acts, many of them are supporting working people in Victoria, and for me that is a really important part of us being in government and putting forward legislation that supports working people.

Of course Geelong is very much a working-class city. People in my electorate rely on legislation such as the acts I have just listed. I want to thank the many unions and industry bodies that have been involved in ensuring this legislation is put before the Parliament. As I said, many of those acts that have been mentioned support working people and make sure they have the protections in place for working people in our community of Victoria. We also had the labour hire review, which the member for Sydenham and previous Minister for Industrial Relations, who is in the chamber today, played an enormous role in. I recall when I was the president of Geelong Trades Hall the minister coming to Geelong and talking to many contractors and unions in my community about the importance of this legislation, so it does mean a lot for my community of Geelong.

The purposes of the amendments are mostly technical in nature. These changes will improve the operation of the acts. Other changes will implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work. Finally, amendments will be made recognising that from 1 July this year the Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body. The changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act will benefit a small group of workers. Amendments to that act will also benefit employers, mainly in the community services sector. I want to acknowledge the important work of the Australian Services Union in relation to particularly the Long Service Benefits Portability Act and the work that they put in and the work that they did with their members. As a member of the Australian Services Union myself, I was actively involved in some of those campaigns and the fight to ensure that portability and the importance of that.

The amendments to the labour hire act will also benefit businesses that have been affected by the pandemic. I think whatever improvements we can put in place are really important to labour hire workers in our community and small business. The pandemic has obviously impacted on many, including in my electorate of Geelong, so anything that we can do to make improvements is very important.

Amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act and the Inquiries Act implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work. The Equal Opportunity Act obviously is a really important act. For example, with the amendments a contract worker will be protected from detrimental action such as dismissal if they ask their employer to modify their workplace to account for a disability. This right already applies to directly engaged employees. So we need to ensure that contract workers have the same rights as permanent employees, and I think that is a great amendment and important to people within my community. The Inquiries Act will also be amended in response to recommendations
from our labour hire inquiry. Rights under those two acts that currently apply to directly engaged workers will be extended to labour hire and contract workers. This means that a contract worker who gives evidence to a royal commission inquiry or formal review will enjoy protections under the act already afforded to directly engaged workers.

These amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act will give the Labour Hire Authority greater control over its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund within the public account. The amendments will also permit the assessment of an annual licence fee based on the turnover of the most recent four quarters of trading rather than the turnover at the time a licence was granted. This ensures that up-to-date figures can be used. The amendments further provide the authority with the ability to grant a reduction in licence fees or waive or refund fees in certain circumstances. This may be used to provide relief to labour hire providers, particularly in light of the coronavirus or to reflect a licence-holder’s fee classification where there has been a change in the circumstances of the business beyond its control.

The Long Service Benefits Portability Act: as I mentioned earlier, this was a long fight for workers. As I said, as an ASU member—and also president of Geelong Trades Hall—we were very active in ensuring that this bill came to light and that workers got what they deserved. I think in the community sector in particular, in the important work that they do and the various roles community workers play, there is a lot of movement around the sector. Being able to move from job to job, there were good benefits to that. However, taking your long service with you was not there for community support workers when I was working in that sector. So to be able to do that is really significant.

The bill amends the Long Service Benefits Portability Act to improve the portability scheme for the contract cleaning, community services and security sectors. The scheme commenced on 1 July 2019 and has been very successful, with over 2275 employers and around 150 000 workers now registered. A number of improvements to the scheme have now been identified and are reflected in the bill. The act will amend legislation to allow for new regulations allowing the Portable Long Service Authority to reimburse community service sector employers where the employer pays a long service leave entitlement to an employee under the Long Service Leave Act or under a common-law contract. The reimbursement power already applies with respect to federal awards or enterprise agreements. Turning to the contract cleaning and security sectors, this amendment will benefit employers in these sectors and ensure that they will not have to pay twice for the same period of service. Employers who have already paid the employee under one of the instruments can still apply for reimbursement.

When we look at what is happening in our federal Parliament, the changes proposed by the Morrison government to the industrial relations legislation are shameful, and they are going to impact on working people right across this country. I know in my community of Geelong there are real concerns about what this legislation will mean to working people, because what it will do will take away their rights or reduce their wages and will allow employers to abuse workers, as we have seen in the past. Legislation is there to control that and help to prevent that from happening, but with the reduction of workers rights through this federal legislation there will be an enormous impact. For working people in my community, I know that that is going to be immense. People already struggle under a lot of different circumstances. To take away penalty rates, to take away their rights as workers, will cause real damage to them, and given we are still in the recovery phase of the global pandemic it will impact even further. The federal government should be condemned for even considering making these shocking changes at a time when people can least afford them.

So this is a really important bill that we are talking about today, and it is about protecting the rights of workers and ensuring that they have the protections that they need in a whole range of different areas of acts. We as lawmakers need to ensure workers are protected.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (17:12): It is an absolute delight to get up this afternoon and speak on this bill, following such intelligent, eloquent contributions from my colleagues. Can I start off by acknowledging the hard work of the Minister for Industrial Relations and Treasurer on this bill. Now,
some people will have you believe that this bill is dry, it is about dots and dashes and it is not all that interesting. But as a former shop steward on a fire station, I must admit that I go to great lengths to read enterprise bargaining agreements—not just my EBA, other professions’ EBAs—and I go to great lengths to read through legislation like this, because it means so much to working people. Those dots and dashes can mean the difference between a safe workplace and people actually having the dollars to rub together to feed their families. So that is pretty much what this bill is about. It is purely a Labor bill. We have heard I guess some conjecture from those opposite, and I will get to that soon.

The bill strengthens a number of Victorian laws to provide financial relief for employers while maintaining strong protections for workers. And the number one thing people need to take away from this debate is that if you are not doing the wrong thing, this basically does not regulate you. If you are not doing the wrong thing, this will not affect you. This is all about a fine balance between ensuring that employers can run their businesses and workers can take home a fair wage for a fair day’s work.

The bill is an omnibus bill and it amends a number of existing acts, including the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. The purpose of these amendments is to ensure Victoria continues to lead the way with initiatives to protect workers, showing that we are committed to assisting both employers and workers to have fruitful relationships every step of the way.

As those before me have said, the amendments are fairly technical in nature, but they do have large ramifications and they improve the operations of these acts. Other changes will implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work, which is a very interesting read, and finally amendments will be made recognising that from 1 July this year the Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body. The changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act will benefit a small group of workers. Amendments to that act will also benefit employers, mainly in the community services sector. And the amendments to the labour hire act will also benefit businesses that have been affected by the pandemic.

Now, you will not be surprised that a Labor government brings a bill like this forward. Of course Labor is proud to be the party of workers—the only party of workers—and make no mistake, it will deliver and continue to deliver protections for workers, maintaining a fair balance between employers, business and worker interests as well.

People have mentioned the party of WorkCover. I do not think I need to labour this point. That party has never done anything to help workers. Seeing them try to tear down unions, which really are collectives of workers if we are splitting hairs, is quite shameful. And it was not until I was in this role, after being employed in a safe job with an EBA, that I began to realise the amount of workers out there that did not have EBAs, were in insecure work and were being taken advantage of. And it is bills like this that go a long way to protect them. From the accord to compulsory super to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act and keeping labour hire firms to account, only this party has delivered and will continue to deliver for workers. I guess you could say that protecting workers is in our DNA.

I will get to some of the changes in the bill, which are necessary and also very interesting, I might say. The Equal Opportunity Act is being amended in response to recommendations of the labour hire inquiry, which many people would be intimate with in this house. Rights under this act that currently apply to directly engaged workers will be extended to contract workers. An example of that would be that a contract worker will be protected from detrimental actions, such as a dismissal maybe, if they ask their employer to modify their workplace to account for a disability. This right already applies to directly engaged employees but not to contract workers, and I think anybody who is a reasonable person would suggest that this is a fair change to make.

The changes that we are proposing to the Inquiries Act include it being amended in response to recommendations of our labour hire inquiry. Rights under this act that currently apply to directly
engaged workers will be extended to labour hire and contract workers, and effectively the tangible benefits of this are that a contract worker who gives evidence to a royal commission, an inquiry or a formal review will enjoy protections under the act already afforded to directly engaged workers. Once again, I think anyone who is a reasonable person would be easily swayed to the fact and the point of view that these are fair.

Changes to the Labour Hire Licensing Act include amendments which will give the Labour Hire Authority control over its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund within the public account. The amendments also permit the assessment of an annual licence fee based on the turnover of the most recent four quarters of trading in the last 12 months rather than the turnover of the time a licence was granted, and this ensures that up-to-date figures can be used. I was surprised to learn that the Labour Hire Authority’s annual report shows that in the 2019–20 year the Labour Hire Authority conducted 1050 education and compliance inspections of providers under the licensing scheme, exceeding the target of 800 inspections. In the 2019–20 year the authority finalised 3271 licence applications, exceeding the target of 1300 applications finalised. And the authority has received over three times the number of licence applications estimated from initial modelling. That really goes to exemplify the explosion we have seen in these labour hire firms.

The changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act are basically to improve the portability scheme for the contract cleaning, community services and also security sectors, and it was a very proud moment to be in this house and speak on that very important bill that gave workers more security around their leave entitlements such that they could take them with them.

We have heard many people in the house today talk about the proud legacy of this Labor government and the proud pedigree indeed of this Labor government in protecting workers. It was a very proud moment to stand in this house and contribute to the debate on the Workplace Safety Legislation Amendment (Workplace Manslaughter and Other Matters) Bill 2019, which is a key piece of the Andrews Labor government’s overall framework to protect workers. I must admit I was a little bit stunned at some of the things I did hear during that debate and how out of touch some members were, how many assumptions were made about people running businesses or people that had not run businesses and also how little knowledge there was about what it takes to run a business at times. There seemed to be a lot of generalisation—and a lot of well-meaning but I guess inaccurate generalisations as well.

The Long Service Leave Act will be amended to extend the prohibition of the use of common-law contracts, and that abrogates employer obligations under the act to post-employment arrangements. An example of this would be an employer no longer being able to use the settlement in an unfair dismissal case to get out of paying long service leave entitlements. I must admit, when we first looked at the report from this inquiry I was actually shocked to see that that could happen. I was also very shocked to see a number of other issues that had seemed to be very popular and were raised many, many times but seemed to be very, very unfair and skewed definitely in one direction, in favour of employers over employees. To those opposite I would say this is not so much an issue of whether you are a unionist or a non-unionist; this is about being fair. It just so happens I think everyone on this side of the house is a unionist, and there is strength in unity, trust me, but I would say that this bill also should be considered in the framework of what is fair and what is not fair. For any government not to strive to improve workers rights and the relationship between workers and employers during their term would be relegating our industrial relations system to the past. This is a good example of us keeping up with what is happening and ensuring that the future is in good hands.

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (17:22): It is with great pleasure that I rise in this place today to speak on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021.

Mr Halse: It’s a good one.
Mr TAYLOR: It is a good one, member for Ringwood, and, as I always do in this place, I acknowledge the Treasurer and obviously the cabinet for the work they put into this. Of course it is an omnibus bill, which I know other members in this place have discussed. When you look at it, it is obviously quite technical in nature but certainly no less important otherwise. It is fantastic to just hear some of the contributions—to hear from the member for Geelong about her local context and the importance that this bill has for the workers and the people of Geelong, and to listen to the good member for Frankston, the fantastic member for Frankston. The member for Croydon has not spoken, but I am sure he will have a few words to say about how this will benefit the good people of Croydon as well. Just to mention as well for the record, I am a little disappointed the member for Croydon will not be at the football game this week. Apparently dinner is a little bit more important. We are unfurling a couple of flags, but that is all right, mate, that is fine.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Suleyman): Order!

Mr TAYLOR: Thank you very much. I will probably get back to the bill, Acting Speaker. But I am very proud to be in this place. It is never quite lost on me, obviously, the privilege of being able to represent my community, the community of the Bayswater district—there are over 60,000 people in my community that I represent in this place—and to talk about and represent them on a piece of legislation that goes to the very heart of what Labor governments are about. It is about backing in our workers, protecting our workers and making sure we back them in every step of the way.

For me, growing up in Dandenong with a pretty tough background, looking up the legislation of governments of the past—obviously not in my younger years through the Kennett years—as I started to grow up and get a little older and understand exactly what I was seeing on TV, I understood that it is Labor governments that back in working people, that protect workers. To be here today, to be representing the community, to be passing—hopefully—legislation that will, as I understand it, be getting support from the other side as well, such important legislation, and to keep on working towards ensuring we protect workers rights and back them in, particularly in the current context of COVID, is so important.

Even through my context as well—previously as a police officer—it was fantastic that this government backed in police and worked towards a fantastic outcome for the enterprise bargaining agreement. Some of the things that we discuss when we talk about protecting workers rights, including public holiday rates—police officers did not have public holiday rates; they did not exist when I first joined. We got them back under this government. Of course we enshrined the grand final public holiday. There is just a litany of things that this government has done to enshrine better workplace rights, fair pay and fair conditions. Whereas the other side wants to get rid of the grand final public holiday. Outrageous, I would have thought—outrageous. We have obviously enshrined that. That is here to stay, and that is incredibly important.

And we are not just talking about public holiday penalty rates. There are things this government has done as well when it comes to protecting workers and making sure we give them a fair go. Workplace manslaughter has been enshrined into law and is now a criminal offence. We took that to the last election. These new laws have been passed because as we know, tragically over the last few years and in many, many years gone by, sadly, as many as 30 people have been killed in workplaces across the state every single year. Twenty people in 2019 sadly lost their lives at the time that the legislation was passed, so we know that that is critically important. That is work that this government has done to continue to back in workers. We know wage theft legislation has passed the Victorian Parliament—extremely critical legislation. We were the first state in the country to pass it and establish new criminal offences targeting employers who deliberately withhold wages.

If we look to the current context today, there are positive economic signs for Victoria. We know how difficult the last year has been. We know that Victoria is getting back on its feet. We are moving
hopefully into post COVID. We are in COVID normal now. Victorians have done a fantastic job getting together and working with one another, and our business community has done it well tough as well. We know that we are slowly coming out the other end of it. We have created a record amount of jobs with our jobs plan: 250 000 by 2022 and 400 000 by 2025. Already the Treasurer, who has done a great job of crafting this bill, has spoken about the amazing economic recovery we have seen. We have seen 170 000 jobs return between the September and December period. Unemployment rates have gone down, and that is good stuff for workers. We are getting people back into work, and when they get there we are giving them fair and decent wages and fair and decent conditions. For those who are still struggling we are also rolling out our jobs advocate plan, so 400 new job search and support workers have obviously clocked on, and they are making sure people can get back into the workforce and making sure they get supported on their way through as well.

Of course we know that the bill before us today will continue this Labor government’s tradition of strengthening a number of Victorian laws to provide for financial relief for employers while maintaining strong protection for workers. The bill will amend a number of existing acts: the Child Employment Act 2003, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Inquiries Act 2014, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Long Service Leave Act 2018 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005.

We know, as I have detailed today, that Victoria does absolutely lead the way in developing initiatives to protect workers. We are continuing to roll those out and we are committed to improving them every step of the way. And whilst, as I discussed, these amendments are mostly technical in nature, we know that these changes will improve the operation of the acts and that other changes will implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, something we know we need to get right, something we need to fix. That is partly discussed in this bill as well.

Finally, amendments will be made recognising that from 1 July this year Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body, which I know is something that the member for Ringwood and I have discussed in the past and is critically important, and I am glad to see it is included in this legislation here today.

Of course we know the changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act will benefit a small group of workers, but amendments to that act will also benefit employers, mainly in the community services sector. The amendments to the labour hire act will also benefit businesses that have been affected by the pandemic, and amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act and the Inquiries Act implement recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into labour hire and insecure work, something which I know the member for Frankston and the member for Sunbury have spoken about passionately in the halls of this place, and I know they will be very supportive of these measures and just as stoked as I am that we are here talking in this place and, as I said, will hopefully pass this legislation here today. We know that the Equal Opportunity Act has been amended in response to recommendations of our labour hire inquiry, and rights under this act that currently apply to directly engaged workers will be extended to contract workers.

In relation to the Inquiries Act, the Inquiries Act will also be amended in response to recommendations of our labour hire inquiry, and rights under this act currently applying to directly engaged workers will be extended to labour hire and contract workers. This means that a contract worker who gives evidence to a royal commission, an inquiry or a formal review will enjoy the protections under the act already afforded to directly engaged workers.

In relation to the labour hire act, the amendments to the Labour Hire Licensing Act will give the Labour Hire Authority greater control over its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund within the public account. Amendments also permit the assessment of the annual licence fee based on the turnover of the most recent four quarters of trading rather than the turnover at the time a licence was granted. Of course this ensures that up-to-date figures can be used. The amendments also further provide the authority with the ability to grant a reduction in licence fees or waive or refund fees in
certain circumstances. This may be used to provide relief to labour hire providers, particularly in light of COVID-19, or to reflect a licence-holder’s fee classification where there has been a change in the circumstances of the business beyond its control.

We know about some of the changes to the Long Service Benefits Portability Act. This bill amends that act to improve the portability scheme for the contract cleaning, community services and security sectors, something I know again—the member for Frankston is listening intently—the member for Frankston and I have discussed in the past. It is critically important. I really appreciate the member for Frankston’s work not just in his local community but also I know in his conversations with the Treasurer and me on this particular legislation. We know that the Andrews Labor government is particularly proud to have implemented an affordable long service benefits scheme for workers in community services, security and contract cleaning.

There is so much more to talk about in this bill. I am very proud to be here today to speak in support of it, and I commend this bill to the house.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (17:32): What a treat that was, managing to tick along at a lazy 180 or 190 words per minute. The member for Bayswater never fails to entertain and frequently of course at lightning pace. I want to thank the member for Croydon for subjecting himself to what can only be described as a lonely afternoon here in the chamber—not exactly surrounded by your comrades over there, the member for Croydon. It has obviously been a big day.

Mr Hodgett: Huge.

Mr FOWLES: A huge day, a day not without misadventure. There have been some interesting epithets thrown around, some descriptors like—

A member: Hillbillies.

Mr FOWLES: Yes, hillbillies is a good one. I am not sure if the member for Croydon qualifies for hillbilly status; I am not quite sure whether he was in there, was in the analysis. I am pretty sure Warrandyte was in there, but there you go.

It is my pleasure to make a contribution this afternoon on the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. It is of course an omnibus bill, one of our favourite words over on this side of the chamber—a word that has probably been weaponised fairly effectively by some over the course of this year. I remain confused about whether the Proud Boys and Reignite Democracy Australia actually thought that they were referencing in fact a bus, a type of bus—you know, the omnibus bill, the omnibus wagon, and you have got your omnisedan, your omnimotorbike. But it is an omnibus bill, and for the benefit of all three of you following along at home, that means that it makes amendments to a number of acts simultaneously.

A member interjected.

Mr FOWLES: Yes, to our audience, perhaps. This is a bill that is going to provide for more secure work, a more empowered wage inspectorate and a more accessible long service leave portability scheme. It is important—it is really important—to have that portability, not just for the obvious reasons that those of us on this side of the chamber would always point to, which are about protecting the rights of workers, making sure that workers receive fair compensation for their labour, that everyone is afforded the opportunity to have the dignity and security of work—not just for those reasons.

It is actually an economic issue around efficiency, because it ultimately supports labour force flexibility. Those opposite are pretty wedded to the idea that labour force flexibility comes through individual contracts, but we say on this side that labour force flexibility is important and that it can be supported with a whole bunch of measures that are not just about forcing workers onto individual contracts. Things like long service leave portability improve the flexibility and the mobility of the
labour force as a whole. That is a very good thing. That is exactly the sort of thing that should be welcomed by members on both sides of the chamber.

I think it is important to note that contract workers are dealt with in a number of the measures in this omnibus bill. They are workers who have access to very few workplace rights and guarantees, largely because of the stance of the commonwealth in relation to those workers. Contract workers and workers that work for labour hire firms, who are often one and the same—often labour hire firm workers are contractors as well—are at the least secure end of the spectrum. We have seen over the course of 2020 and into this year just how damaging insecure work can be, not just for the economic outcomes, not just for the personal outcomes for the individual workers, but for the public health outcomes. It is so important that we up the protections around these categories of workers—these workers who are working for labour hire firms and those working as contractors.

I have got to say, in my personal view, I hate labour hire firms. I reckon theirs is a particular type of vulturism in a market capitalist society where they take all the supply out of the market and they drip-feed it back at inflated rates. By becoming, effectively, monopoly employers they can then exploit their workers and also exploit those businesses who rely on those workers. It is a dreadful part of the system, and if I were to have my druthers, I would say to have an end to all of them. Let us get rid of labour hire firms. They are shocking bloody things, and to the extent that they impinge on the ability of businesses to access and retain high-quality workers on their own account, they perform an economic harm, not an economic good—a serious economic harm.

So it is so important in an environment where labour hire farms are scooping up pools of labour, where they are, as I say, drip-feeding that labour back to businesses, that nonetheless we provide some of the protections for those workers that currently apply to workers who do not work for labour hire firms and do not find themselves in that particular set of economic circumstances.

I think the long service leave protections are really important because they survive the employment relationship. These are protections that do not attach contemporaneously with the time of employment; they actually attach after the event. So in circumstances where a business goes broke or in circumstances where the employee has moved on and then later on catches up to this entitlement that is sitting there we actually make damn sure that they have the ability to access those payments. That supports that absolutely critical, fundamental Labor value about the dignity of work and about a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work and making sure that people are supported for long periods of service for a whole range of businesses.

The Andrews Labor government is proud to have implemented this portable long service benefits scheme for workers in community services, because we know that those workers are amongst the lowest paid and are often subjected to the most insecure work, but also workers in security and contract cleaning. We changed the laws to make things fairer for some of those very hardworking Victorians—Victorians who have worked years in the same job in the same place but have not been able to accrue those long service benefits. I am very pleased to note that the scheme commenced coming up to two years ago and that over 2200 employers and nearly 150 000 workers have been registered on the scheme. Necessarily when you have a big enrolment like that and you have a whole lot of people utilising the benefits of the rules that are passed, there are opportunities now to improve the operation of the scheme and to tweak the legislation to make sure that we are continuing to deliver a system that is fair, that is efficient, that is principled and that is ultimately in support of economic growth.

One of the other changes here is to make sure that the Labour Hire Authority will ultimately sit out on its own. These are functions that are currently fulfilled by a whole range of offices across a range of departments, and it supports the efficiency of these regulatory arrangements and supports the efficient administration of public functions and public moneys to reorganise this in a way that is far more efficient than the present set of circumstances. It completes, frankly, a set of changes that were set in train a couple of years ago as a result of the inquiry that was conducted into this sector.
As the Treasurer and Minister for Industrial Relations said in his second-reading speech—and I thank him for his work on this bill in addition to his very significant responsibilities as Treasurer of the great state of Victoria—the proposed amendments have no adverse effect on the right of employers, workers or the community as a whole, and a number of them enhance those individual rights. Well, if there was a better benchmark for all legislation before this place, I think that is it. You want to see no adverse effects—systemic effects, economic effects—and you want to see positive effects on those individuals whom we are charged in this place with the very great honour of representing, the very great honour of looking after, particularly those who find themselves in the part of the economy that is most at risk of exploitation. Portable long-service leave benefits and the portability of them are very, very, very important for those workers—and very important, as I have said, to support labour force mobility, which ultimately is one of the big drivers of economic growth.

These protections that are extended by this bill, the efficiency measures that are delivered by this bill and the ability for workers to be fully rewarded for their labour are such important things for those on this side of the chamber. I thank the Treasurer and Minister for Industrial Relations for his work on it, and I take great pleasure in commending the bill to the house.

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) (17:42): I am pleased to also rise to make a contribution to this very important bill before the house today, the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, which is essentially an omnibus bill that covers a number of existing acts and makes amendments to those acts. There are a number in there, but I wanted to specifically focus on three of them, and they would be the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 and the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018. I did want to mention at the outset that while these changes improve the operation of a number of acts, the changes that will be implemented come from the recommendations of the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work, which was done some years ago now but came into effect last year.

Also from 1 July this year the Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be constituted as a statutory body, and essentially that is important because many of the amendments in these acts relate specifically to the Wage Inspectorate Victoria institution, which will become a statutory body from 1 July. Currently it sits within the Department of Premier and Cabinet and is responsible for administering the Long Service Leave Act 2018, the Child Employment Act 2003 and the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005. Departmental secretaries are empowered under those acts to exercise and delegate a number of compliance and enforcement functions and powers, and as the compliance and enforcement powers are under those acts they are going to be transferred to the inspectorate by the Wage Theft Act 2020 from 1 July 2021. This is an important connection to make between the amendments to many of these acts and the wage inspectorate.

I wanted to mention specifically the portable long service leave amendment. This is also an important change, because the act currently provides that at least one person must be appointed by the minister to represent employer interests and at least one person to represent employee interests. The minister is also required to seek a balance in representation. But the amendments in this omnibus bill will set board membership at three people nominated by employers for a covered sector and three people nominated by unions for a covered sector, with the remaining two board members to be independent and serve as the chair and deputy chair.

I am very pleased to speak about the Long Service Benefits Portability Act and the implementation by the Andrews Labor government of portable long service leave. It was back in June 2019, I think, that I was very fortunate to stand alongside the member for Oakleigh, who at the time was also Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer. He made the trip to Bendigo. Many of you will know that Bendigo is actually the home of the Portable Long Service Authority. We are very proud of that and the fact that it brought 30 jobs to Bendigo and is operating successfully at Bendigo. It was a pleasure to have the member for Oakleigh attend on that day and make those fantastic announcements for our community. This is all about the Andrews Labor government making it fairer for people working in the industries that we know are insecure—the security industry, contract cleaning and community services.
That benefits scheme commenced on 1 July 2019, and what it meant was that workers in those industries could accrue long service leave and sick leave entitlements and transfer them from job to job within the same industry, which they had been unable to do previously. What it did was add security and fairness for workers in those sectors. Many of them were performing the same work in the same place for many years but without being able to accrue that long service leave. There was a parliamentary committee established, which found that these instances of people being unable to transfer their long service leave were very common across those industries I just mentioned. We are very pleased to have the authority headquartered in Bendigo, employing more than 30 people, administering the scheme and ensuring compliance. This is a great benefit to Bendigo and indeed to all those people who have joined up to the scheme. It means more jobs for our local people in Bendigo as well.

In relation to the Equal Opportunity Act, I wanted to mention the fact that there was a submission made to the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work some time ago. In the Equal Opportunity Act currently contract workers are not protected if they make a reasonable demand, such as accommodation to support their disability. This amendment will absolutely change that, and this is really important because it comes directly from that inquiry. In fact recommendation 4 of that inquiry says:

The Government should introduce amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 … to clarify that the protections from discrimination in respect of an employee engaging in employment activity, and reasonable adjustments for an employee with a disability, apply in the context of a host’s relationship with a labour hire employee.

Essentially this is absolutely implementing a recommendation from the Victorian inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work.

I am very fortunate to have a long-time friend of over probably 55 years who is the CEO of JobWatch. We started school together when we were just babies, and we are still friends to this day. I think that their submission to the labour hire industry and insecure work inquiry highlighted the inequalities, particularly in relation to labour hire and equal opportunity. I just want to read one part of the submission they made, which highlights, I think, how women particularly with disabilities were excluded—they will not be after this bill is passed—and continue to be excluded when they confront a disability at work. The statement goes:

Tracey, our client and young mother, was employed by a labour hire company as a casual employee to work as a process worker at the host organisation. The host organisation required Tracey and its other workers to work on 5 different machines per day on a rotational basis.

Tracey suffered a back injury and was unable to work on one of the machines. She sought reasonable adjustments from the host company to accommodate her disability but the host refused on the basis that it would be too disruptive to the other workers and would interfere with their food processing system.

Tracey filed a claim at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal … alleging indirect disability discrimination and failure to provide reasonable adjustments.

This was a test case in relation to whether the host employer had to provide reasonable adjustments under the Equal Opportunity Act. That case was settled by mediation, but I think it highlights why the change to the Equal Opportunity Act in this particular omnibus bill is so important—because the evidence presented at that inquiry and the relevant case law that is attached to it clearly illustrate that there are a number of ways in which labour hire employees miss out on protections against unfair treatment at work that are enjoyed by other workers, particularly workers who might incur or already have a disability.

This bill is particularly pertinent in light of what is currently happening at the federal level and changes to workplace laws that will absolutely be deleterious to our workers across the country. In a time of pandemic, when we know that people are suffering extraordinarily, particularly in relation to secure work, this is the wrong time to be introducing that type of legislation. This government is about making sure our workers are supported irrespective of whether we are in a pandemic or not. We support our workers always, and have always, from work safety through to equal opportunity through to labour
hire, ensuring our labour hire industry is kept to account. We want to make sure that every worker in this state is looked after and protected, and we will continue to do that. I note that the opposition are not speaking on this bill, and I think that says a lot about what they think about workers in this state. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (17:52): It is a pleasure to rise on such an important bill. It is an omnibus bill, as the member for Burwood said, so it amends a range of important acts. While I would not recommend it as a cure for insomnia, some would say that there are fairly dull matters in this bill. But the basic reference point is the acts and legislation we have passed as a government over the last several years, and they are far from dull. They are substantial acts and legislation that in and of themselves construct a framework of protection of worker rights and also meet labour force demands in a range of areas.

I can see that the former Minister for Industrial Relations, the member for Sydenham, is at the table. I want to thank her for the contribution that she has made over the course of this journey, and I obviously want to thank the current Minister for Industrial Relations, who happens to be the Treasurer. I thought that was an odd fit initially, because the Treasurer is someone who is prudent with money but also has effectively to sign off on workforce pay rises or workforce negotiations. I also want to thank Amanda from his office. I had the pleasure of working with the Treasurer and Amanda from his office while I was his parliamentary secretary, and he could have no better adviser—she is outstanding, as is he.

I also want to pay a fair bit of regard to a union that I am still a member of, and that is the United Workers Union, and the National Union of Workers before them. They are an extraordinary union for two reasons. They are not afraid to have effectively an argument and a fight, go out there and actually undertake industrial action when it is protected and lawful to get some outcomes for their workers.

We are talking about some of the lowest paid workers, and I respect the ability and the gumption and the heart and the courage of a union in this day and age to actually undertake industrial action when it is protected and lawful to do that work. I also have another thing that I regard them highly for. While the former may be more pervasive in the union movement, the second one which I am about to mention is probably less so, and that is that they have such a big influence in policy development for this side of politics, both state and federal, because they come from the lived experience of workers. So they come with real problems and real-world solutions.

We do not adopt every aspect of what they put to us, but we take real notice of the power of that union in informing government policy because of their lived experience. So I want to pay respect to them, their leadership and their staff.

The Deputy Speaker did say that she had the pleasure of me coming to her electorate, but I actually had the pleasure of going to her electorate. And on that day when we, on behalf of the Treasurer and Minister for Industrial Relations, announced the opening of the Portable Long Service Authority, I learned three things. I learned that, number one, the Deputy Speaker knows her patch really well; number two, that she is a far better TV performer than I am, as a lot of regional MPs are because they deal with regional television and media—she was outstanding; and number three, what a difference the location of this authority in regional Victoria actually makes. Whilst it is a statewide authority, there is no reason why it should not be located in regional Victoria, and I am really pleased that I was in a small way part of that announcement on behalf of the minister at that point.

As other speakers have said, this government has not just tinkered around the edges of industrial relations. We did not just take the remit provided to us by previous governments back from when the industrial relations powers were sent to the commonwealth by Jeff Kennett. In my view we have become the most engaged state government in relation to industrial relations. We have found many opportunities to play in that space for the benefit of workers and employers. I think the member for Burwood said our investments in supporting workers in these industries actually enhance labour market flexibility. You are more likely to stay in those kinds of casualised industries if you are supported through a framework of better rights and better pay and conditions. Therefore the employer,
and the customer at the end of the day, the Victorian community, get more longevity in those workforces and less costs—

Ms Ward: More productivity.

Mr DIMOPOULOS: more productivity—that is right, as the member for Eltham said—less cost in training this revolving door of workers coming in and out of those industries, better health outcomes and better industry performance generally. So this is not just an investment in the workforce; it is actually an investment in those industries. For people on the other side, the catchcry is always, ‘Oh well, it’s a cost to doing business’. Everything is a cost of doing business. Laying down a road for a truck to deliver a product is a cost of doing business as they are paying taxes. But there is an intersectionality in what we do. We pick the industries and the labour forces that are most vulnerable, and that is where we direct most of our attention for the benefit of all. We have done that in many ways, but that is not all we do.

We provide good-quality education from kinder right through to free TAFE. That is an investment in a labour force for an employer now and into the future. We provide scholarships for a range of different industries that we need further investment in; for example, teachers and nurses and a mental health lived experience workforce. The royal commission was pretty strong on the ability for the lived experience workforce to get a career path and to get a range of opportunities within the new mental health system. We do a whole range of other things in supporting a labour market and employers. Like the Premier has often said, the long-term order book for infrastructure, whether it be the building of trains and trams or other things, actually promotes labour market stability and confidence. We have done that in social policy too through our 10-year kinder plan—promoting confidence in people coming forward to be kinder teachers—and inclusive schools and a whole range of other areas.

This bill comes on a long list of other reforms and investments we have made in this area of policy. These changes specifically in this bill today amend a range of acts from the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018, the Long Service Benefits Portability Act 2018, the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005 and a range of others that other speakers have referred to.

In the time I have left I just want to pay some regard to a couple of those—there are many, but a couple of them. In fact one, as the Deputy Speaker said, that I was involved with is the Labour Hire Licensing Act and the amendments to that act to give the Labour Hire Authority greater control over its finances by allowing it to establish its own trust fund within the public accounts—so giving some confidence to that agency to actually manage its remit and its financial parameters.

The amendments also permit the assessment of an annual licence fee based on the turnover of the most recent four quarters of trading—so the past 12 months—rather than the turnover at the time the licence was granted. That makes incredible sense, both in terms of the response to the COVID economic downturn and just generally. The amendments further provide the authority with the ability to grant a reduction in licence fees or waive or refund fees in certain circumstances.

The other element of this bill that I want to briefly touch on is the Long Service Benefits Portability Act, which I had a little bit of a role in announcing at its start in Bendigo. This scheme commenced on 1 July 2019 and has seen 150 000 workers now registered in Victoria, which is an extraordinary number and is a really good news story. A number of improvements to the scheme have now been identified and are reflected in this bill that we are debating today. They range from reimbursement powers, making sure that employers are not required to pay twice, to better governance arrangements, appointments to the governing board and a whole range of those other benefits. So those other investments will be made through this bill.

As I started off with, while this is not the most exciting bill to contribute to, the acts it actually supports and enhances are extraordinarily exciting, important and fundamental to workers rights, the labour
Ms WARD (Eltham) (18:02): Thank you, Acting Speaker Suleyman. It is terrific to see you today. Firstly, I do agree, as I often do, with the member for Oakleigh, who is a superstar, that this is an important bill. It is such an important bill that I wonder why those opposite are not actually speaking on it. I suspect that is, as I am sure the member for Oakleigh will agree, because they are not interested in anything to do with industrial relations if it is to the benefit of workers. Anything that benefits workers in this place they are never interested in.

Mr Dimopoulos: It’s anathema to them.

Ms WARD: It is anathema to them; you are absolutely right, member for Oakleigh. As a uni student one of the many jobs that I had was working at the Australian Open tennis as a cleaner. It was terrific. I got to see a lot of tennis, I got to hang out with some cool people, I got in elevators with tennis players—

A member: Bjorn Borg!

Ms WARD: I’m not that old. You are right, the rumours are true—Jim Courier is a really lovely guy. He would come down and have a beer or a coffee—a drink—with the cleaners. He was a terrific bloke, actually.

But people will also not be surprised that in being a cleaner at the tennis it is actually pretty easy to be exploited. It is extremely easy when you are a casual worker working long hours; especially in the evenings when the roof of the tennis centre is shut, it is pretty hot. When it has been a 40-degree day and you are trying to clean in there, it is excruciatingly hot, and in trying to argue for improved rights, which is what I did—I am sure nobody on this side of the house would be surprised to hear that I am a bit of a troublemaker when it comes to workers rights—I lasted two years as a cleaner at the tennis, and then they just lost it with me because I got too cranky. But with that job that I had, leave would never have accumulated. Long service leave would never have accumulated without our changes.

I remember a few years ago that, along with my colleagues, I met with a number of cleaners in this place—cleaners who despite working at the same business or venue for decades were not entitled to long service leave as the contractor regularly changed. So while they turned up for work every day at the same place, working with the same people, doing the same work, they were never able to accumulate long service leave because the employer would change when the contract changed. We fixed this inequality in implementing a portable long service leave benefits scheme for those workers. We know that this has been important. As the member for Oakleigh pointed out, around 150 000 workers have registered for this scheme since it was implemented on 1 July in 2019. That shows you how many people would have missed out on this benefit, who would have missed out on the opportunity to have a holiday with their family, to get some work done around their house, to actually rest, to smell the roses, to have some time out. 150 000 people now will have the opportunity to do just that—the same opportunity that is afforded to anybody else who qualifies for long service leave.

One of the many good aspects of this bill is allowing the Portable Long Service Authority to help both businesses and employees further in providing for long service leave. We are making changes to the law that help workers in this sector not miss out on long service leave credits and payments. For example, this means that community service sector employees can apply to the authority to be credited for days worked in circumstances where their employer has not provided relevant information to the authority to credit them with that service, such as, you know, when a business is no longer operating.

Acting Speaker Suleyman, as I am sure you did, I had a few International Women’s Day events last week. One of them was my IWD breakfast where I honour the memory of Pauline Toner, who was the first woman from my area elected to this chamber and the first woman in the state to become a minister. She was also the first mayor and first councillor representing my area as well, but I digress.
We had Gemma Watts speak at this breakfast, who is a terrific young businesswoman. She runs *Glow Journal*, which is a blog, a website and social media, and she also does podcasts around the beauty industry. It is terrific. It is terrific that this woman has created this business out of her own interests, out of her own desires, and is doing a fundamentally fantastic job at it. But coming to that point, Gemma was terrific in being so generous and sharing with the young women who were at my breakfast her experiences as an employee, her experiences as a young woman not understanding when she was being exploited, when she was being ripped off.

It was amazing to her, as it was to us, as the years rolled on and she realised how much work she was giving to the people who were employing her that she was doing actually without pay. She was doing it for the benefit of blogging about the fashion industry and the perks that came with that, for the experience that it was giving her, the networking it was giving her and the skills it was giving her. But she then realised that this was becoming repetitive and she was not being compensated for her work as she should have been, even when she did get paid.

One of the important observations that Gemma made was that there are businesses out there who love to employ young people because young people do not know their rights, and that was exactly what was happening with the employer that she had. That happens. That is why we have laws that protect workers. We know that workers can be vulnerable. We know that workers need laws to protect them, and it is a fundamental fact that we on this side of the chamber understand and that those on that side refuse to accept or understand. They do not accept that workers can be exploited, that workers can be ripped off and that workers can be disadvantaged, and it is shameful that yet again this is another piece of legislation that they did not want to speak on.

This bill also amends the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to require reasonable adjustments to be made in the workplace for workers with a disability. Now, while this already applies to directly engaged employees, contract workers will now also have that right.

Another one of the IWD events that I attended last week was a virtual event with Nillumbik Shire Council, who brought women from the shire together to listen to Carly Findlay, OAM, who is a fantastic woman who is so bright, so clever, so articulate and so able to express herself, to write her story and to convey her story out into the community. It was great listening to her, and she had many good, concise, clear points to make. But one of the ones that resonated with me was the need to ensure that women with disabilities are at the forefront of our minds—always ensuring that there is a place at the table for people who experience, who are living with, a disability. Now, absolutely she is right that in the context of organising events around IWD, in organising conversations and events around expanding the rights of women and levelling us up to get to full equality with men, we always need to have a woman with a disability at that conversation with us. It is the same when we are talking about employment, even when that employment is casual. Women and girls with a disability are among the most marginalised and disadvantaged in communities across the world as well as here at home in Victoria, so this legislation, this allowance, for those who are in casual employment, is important and should not be underestimated. Again, it is another part of this legislation I am surprised that those opposite do not have an opinion on or wish to speak about.

Another issue addressed by these changes is in the Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005, providing clarity for two offences: the failure to provide the information booklet and failure to provide rates and cost schedules in certain circumstances. These amendments make it very clear that not providing these documents is an offence under the act, with penalties applying.

Lastly, I want to talk about wage theft. We know that this government is a reformist and progressive government and we know that this is a government that is focused on looking after people, and a fundamental part of looking after people is helping them into employment but also making sure that they are getting that fair day’s pay for their fair day’s work. It is about making sure that people have the wages to which they are entitled and that people are not ripped off—that their wages are not stolen from them. It is terrific that we are talking about this activity as theft, because that is exactly what it is.
In denying somebody their wages, in denying them their proper payments, that employer is stealing from them. We became the first state to pass laws making it an offence for employers to deliberately underpay or not pay their workers. The Wage Theft Act 2020 establishes the Wage Inspectorate Victoria as a statutory authority to investigate and prosecute wage theft offences from 1 July this year. The bill completes the transference of the inspectorate’s functions, ensuring compliance with Victoria’s laws relating to child employment, long service leave, owner-drivers and forestry contractors, from the Department of Premier and Cabinet to the new authority. Again, we are looking after workers in this state because that is what we do and that is fundamental to the Labor Party ethos.

Ms Thomas (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (18:12): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS) BILL 2020

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SYSTEM ENHANCEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2021

Council’s agreement

The Acting Speaker (Ms Suleyman) (18:13): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2020 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (System Enhancements and Other Matters) Bill 2021.

Motions

BUDGET PAPERS 2020–21

Debate resumed on motion of Mr Pearson:

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

Mr McGhie (Melton) (18:13): When I finished a couple of sitting weeks ago I was talking about the $50 million Growing Suburbs Fund. Now that the Moorabool council, along with other peri-urban councils, has access to this fund, constituents in the Moorabool side of my electorate have access to this same investment. This investment into sport and recreation and community infrastructure was already well received when Moorabool received $2.5 million to assist in new facilities for the Darley Football Netball Club last year.

Roads connect us to work, school and family. This is even more true for my electorate, with low uptake of public transport and a need for better public transport options for Melton. Many residents own cars—at a higher rate than in other areas of Victoria. It is important that our roads are safe and that they help meet the needs of our growing suburbs. The Labor government is committed to getting Victorians to where they need to be sooner and safer. That is why the budget invests in local road investments, improving our metropolitan road network and creating even more jobs. This budget will upgrade the existing intersection to a signalised intersection to and from Norton Drive and High Street near the Chemist Warehouse and other retailers, improving safety for pedestrians and drivers.

It also includes $12.74 million to replace the existing roundabout at High Street and Coburns Road in Melton with traffic lights to help improve safety and journey time on this busy stretch of road. This intersection is close to the Woodgrove shopping centre and the Melton Secondary College and has been in desperate need of an upgrade as Melton continues to grow. The existing crossing from the Woodgrove side of High Street across to the Melton Secondary School is many metres away from the
roundabout. It has also been a dangerous spot, as many drivers come through the roundabout suddenly and are met by the pedestrian crossing.

This new investment will be welcome news for parents, students and the many drivers going through this busy intersection. It will also deliver safety and signalisation improvements in Bacchus Marsh at Main Street, Grant Street, Gisborne Road and Griffith Street. The need for better traffic management in Bacchus Marsh has been something that I have advocated for to relieve stress for the Bacchus Marsh residents. I am pleased that this budget commits investment into these improvements for our residents.

Roads are important to my electorate. The Western Highway is in need of upgrades and investment for new access for Melton as it continues to expand. I will continue to advocate for more funding for this key piece of infrastructure, not just for Melton but for the rest of Victorian commuters. I call on the federal government to invest more in upgrading this vital infrastructure link between Melton and the rest of Melbourne.

This budget will also invest in new works to protect the Lerderderg and Werribee rivers, making sure these rivers remain healthy and available for all of our community. I have had extensive discussions with the Moorabool council as we deliver better recreation facilities for residents. This is a project that council has advocated for during our extensive discussions. The Labor government is also investing $465 million through the Victorian tourism recovery package to attract more visitors to regional Victoria, supporting local jobs and making sure that more Victorian families can experience the best our state has to offer. This investment into regional Victoria will help more small businesses in Moorabool see more local tourism, as the Melton electorate is the gateway to the Grampians and the rest of regional Victoria for many Melburnians.

This budget and this government’s commitment are to help get more Victorians back into work. The Andrews Labor government is setting itself an ambitious target, creating 400,000 new jobs by 2025, half of them by 2022. Our Jobs for Victoria initiative has helped locals in the Melton electorate to find a new job and with it security, stability and certainty. This investment includes $250 million to partner with employers to cover the wages of at least 10,000 new workers. Those positions have been for Victorians hardest hit by this pandemic, including women, young people, retrenched workers and people who have been long-term unemployed. I attended the Melton Botanic Garden a couple of weeks ago with the Minister for Employment in the other house to meet four young people doing great work under the Jobs for Victoria program. Those young people were pleased to have that opportunity to do that work at the botanic gardens.

I am also happy to see this government through this budget continue to support workers, especially vulnerable workers, many of whom are my constituents. Victorians should never have to choose between going to work sick and losing wages, especially amid a pandemic. I am so proud that the Labor government will invest $5 million to develop a new secure work pilot scheme. Once in place the two-year pilot will provide up to five days of sick and carers pay at the national minimum wage for casual or insecure workers in priority industries. This is fantastic news, not just for these workers but for all of us to keep our communities fair, healthier and safer.

I would like to also highlight that the budget will help nearly 1 million families save hundreds on their power bills. Concession card holders such as Victorians receiving JobSeeker payments will be eligible for a one-off $250 payment to help cover the cost of their energy bills. My electorate officers Di and Greg and Nathan have been assisting many constituents. They have been going out to local retirement villages and aged-care facilities to assist those constituents in filling in their applications for this power saving bonus.

Housing has been a key concern for me and many of my western metropolitan MPs. The pressures of housing are something that all our offices deal with regularly. Families in the west need better access to safe and affordable housing. That is why I am thrilled that this budget and this government are also delivering the biggest investment in public and community housing in Australia ever—and that is
$5.3 billion. This investment will build more than 12,000 new homes, making sure that thousands of Victorians have a place to call home and thousands more Victorians have a job.

The City of Melton is a priority area for investment, with procurement starting straightaway to build new homes. Moorabool will also benefit from this investment, with a guaranteed minimum investment of $20 million. This is such a smart investment especially at this time. You would be hard-pressed to find someone who did not support this announcement. The construction jobs this creates are phenomenal. When industry groups for builders and social support services are in agreement, you know that this budget has delivered for Victorians. I would like to thank the western MPs homelessness working group for all their efforts on housing in the west and the continued work they do.

This budget supports families and will make kinder free in 2021 and deliver outside school hours care at up to 400 extra schools, saving parents money and giving them greater flexibility when it comes to work and care. Taking the pressure off working families is essential to economic recovery.

Many Victorians have taken advantage of the Labor government’s offering of the $200 vouchers to encourage families to take a break in regional Victoria. I believe that now that voucher program has been extended to metropolitan Melbourne, which will generate productivity and obviously retain jobs. The scheme is supporting local economies and local jobs throughout the summer and beyond and throughout this year.

A further $235 million will build our recovery workforce, creating 500 new jobs across mental health, family violence, health and child protection. This is a budget to repair, recover and make us stronger than ever before. I want to thank the Premier, the Treasurer and all the ministers for delivering for the Melton electorate and for all Victorians.

Mr Tak (Clarinda) (18:22): I am absolutely delighted to join the hardworking member for Melton to speak on the 2021 budget. Firstly, I would like to start by acknowledging the Premier, the Minister for Health, the chief health officer, the Treasurer and all the ministers for their leadership in 2020. I would like to again thank my community in Clarinda for their courage, determination and dedication throughout 2020 and 2021. To our nurses and our healthcare workers at Monash Health and across the electorate—again, thank you to each and every one of you for the work that you have done in health. To everyone in Clarinda: I know that it has been very difficult for many of you, but it fills my heart with hope that in the face of all of our challenges our community was able to come together, support each other and work together to get to the other side of this.

To be where we are right now is an incredible achievement, a tribute to each and every Victorian, and one that we should all be proud of. So thank you to everyone in Clarinda. I know that the government has asked a lot of you and that some really big sacrifices have been made by a lot of people—by families and small businesses. Everyone has made sacrifices and been affected in really significant ways, but we have come through the worst of the global COVID pandemic together, and now we are going to come through this economic recovery together.

That is what this budget is all about—people and community. People are at the very heart of the recovery effort. That means protecting and creating jobs, looking after families, taking care of our loved ones and building strong, stronger and connected communities.

I am really excited about this budget. It is a historic level of investment which will set up Clarinda and Victoria for a strong recovery and a strong future. This has very much been a health-first recovery, and we have seen the absolute best of the Victorian healthcare system. During the global pandemic we have seen new beds, new buildings and additional staff and technology to deal with the potential incoming demand. The budget builds on the investment and provides $9 billion for our healthcare system, including $2.8 billion to support our health services including supporting the delivery of elective surgery delayed during the pandemic as well as $200 million on the Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund.
Conversely, this pandemic has shown how fragile the safety and wellbeing of our loved ones can be in some private aged-care facilities. As such the Labor government will step up and invest up to $134.6 million to deliver a brand new public sector residential aged-care facility in the Clarinda electorate. This new facility at the Kingston Centre, 400 Warrigal Road, Cheltenham, in Melbourne’s south-east will be operated by Monash Health. The state-of-the-art and dementia-friendly building will consist of 150 beds that will cater for older Victorians with high-care or mental health needs. The facility will be spread across two floors of 30 beds divided into two lots of 15 beds or houses with seven or eight beds consisting of 75 generic high-care beds and 25 aged-person mental health beds. This $135 million investment will make sure that local families in Clarinda have confidence that their parents and grandparents are being looked after.

2020 has also posed an unprecedented challenge in education. As a father of young children I have seen this firsthand through my family, and to all the families in Clarinda who have done a phenomenal job in supporting students learning from home: a huge thankyou once again. Every child, no matter where they go to school, deserves access to state-of-the-art facilities. As such I am so proud that this budget will deliver almost $25 million to improve schools across Clarinda. The investment will make a huge difference for students and teachers at Westall Primary School, Oakleigh South Primary School and South Oakleigh College and support local jobs as we recover from the pandemic.

I was over the moon that the Victorian government is providing $7.2 million to Westall Primary School to build a new learning centre and hub link as part of stage 2 of the Westall Regeneration Project in partnership with the Colman Education Foundation. I had the great pleasure of visiting Westall Primary School in my electorate late last year and early this year to announce this fantastic investment—an investment in Clayton South kids and their future. The Westall Primary School is a great local school, and I look forward to the project.

The budget also delivers $8.85 million to Oakleigh South Primary School to upgrade and modernise the school, including the administration and classroom buildings. I know my good friend the hardworking member for Oakleigh is really excited about this investment, but no-one is more excited than the school principal, Ron. Ron is a fantastic advocate for his school community, and this investment is testament to his hard work. This investment builds on the Oakleigh education plan, which continues to deliver excellence in education to meet the diverse needs of the growing Oakleigh community.

Further relevant to the Oakleigh education plan, following the $992 000 announcement through the Infrastructure Planning and Acceleration Fund, the Victorian government is providing a further $8.93 million to South Oakleigh secondary college to upgrade and modernise the school, including the extension of the gymnasium and the refurbishment of the science block—a wonderful outcome for South Oakleigh students. More broadly on education, the Andrews Labor government has built and upgraded more schools than any government in our state’s history, and this budget continues that record investment in my electorate.

There is really a lot for families in this budget. Another example is affordable energy. I have spoken many times here in this place on energy affordability and just how important this is for many families in Clarinda, and as such I am delighted to see the budget continue the Andrews Labor government’s proud history of delivering reliable, affordable and clean energy for all Victorians. In fact the budget will help nearly 1 million families save hundreds off their power bills. Concession card holders will be eligible for a one-off $250 payment to help cover the cost of their energy bills. An extra 250 000 low-income households will benefit from new, more efficient heating and cooling, whilst heating and cooling and hot-water systems will be upgraded across an extra 35 000 social housing homes, reducing bills for tenants and making winters and summers more affordable. The Labor government’s Solar Homes program will also be extended through an extra 42 000 rooftop solar rebates, plus 14 500 solar batteries, cutting power bills for local communities. These are all amazing initiatives that are already being spoken about in our local community.
From affordable energy to affordable housing: this is another important issue in Clarinda. I am so proud to be part of a government that is delivering the biggest investment in public and community housing in Australia ever. This investment will build more than 12,000 new homes, allowing thousands more Victorians to have a place to call home and thousands more Victorians to have jobs. Social housing is an extremely important aspect of our community. We have a significant number of residents living in social housing in Clarinda and thousands of applicants, many of whom are escaping or have escaped family violence, are living with disability or have significant support or health needs. As I have mentioned before, too many of my constituents are experiencing or at risk of homelessness—nearly 3000 people across Monash and Greater Dandenong. This investment will also be welcomed by many in Clarinda. We saw in 2020 in particular just how absolutely essential a home is to a person’s health and wellbeing. However, not all Victorians have the same access to safe and affordable housing, so this is a big win for all.

Speaking of big wins, the Suburban Rail Loop will link every major train line between the Frankston and Werribee lines—and the Suburban Rail Loop is coming to Clayton. This is a truly amazing project. The transport super-hub will become one of the busiest rail interchanges in Melbourne, with trains running in four different directions. This is really a game changer in terms of the important travel connections to employment, health, education and retail for this century. In terms of the early work, the government will invest $2.2 billion to undertake a range of preparation work. The scope of the preparation works include project development, initial land assessment, construction power work, utility relocation and protection work and the innovation precincts measure, so it is all happening. Importantly, the project is creating jobs, boosting our economy and ensuring the future growth of our community.

Of course jobs are a sure focus and priority in this budget. To help get more Victorians back to work, the government is setting an ambitious target of 400,000 new jobs by 2025—half of them by 2022. The new Working for Victoria initiative will help locals to find new jobs, and with them, security, stability and certainty. This includes $250 million to partner with employers to cover the wages of at least 10,000 new workers. This provision will be for Victorians who have been hardest hit by the global pandemic, including women, young people, retrenched workers and people who have been long-term unemployed. I know this is really going to have an impact in Clarinda.

Another related initiative is the secure work pilot scheme, which the member for Melton has already alluded to. We know too many Victorians are having to choose between going to work sick or losing wages. In response, the Labor government will invest $5 million to develop a new secure work pilot scheme. Once in place, the two-year pilot will provide up to five days of sick and carers pay at the national minimum wage for casual or insecure workers in priority industries.

In the time remaining, I would just like to acknowledge the small business community in Clarinda, especially the hard work and resilience of our small business community. I know that this has been a time of great difficulty for small business across Victoria and throughout my electorate. Since the start of the crisis I have tried to check in with many of our small business owners through phone calls and also through Zoom. I have been really proud to see that many of these businesses accessed the state government’s support, advice and information and were always seeking the correct information during the toughest time. I would like also to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the Clarinda small businesses for their cooperation and most importantly for their dedication to protecting the health and wellbeing of our community. I look forward to working with and assisting our small businesses in any way that I can, and I am looking forward to the rebuilding and the recovery of the Victorian economy. Once again, thank you for your patience and understanding, and I will continue to honour our commitment in terms of making Victoria the best place to own and operate a small business, in Clarinda.

This is a historic budget—a budget that will deliver for all the people of Clarinda and for all Victorians. This is a budget to repair and recover and make us stronger than before. It is a budget that will see us through this recovery together, and I commend it to the house.
Mr EREN (Lara) (18:37): I am also delighted to be speaking on the Appropriation (2020–2021) Bill 2020.

A member: Happy birthday!

Mr EREN: Thank you! It is a never-ending birthday.

I would like to begin obviously by thanking the Treasurer and the Premier for their hard work in delivering yet another great budget in tough times. This bill is what, in very trying times, is needed for this state. I have said it before and I will say it again: one of the reasons why we are such a strong economy is because of the hard work of this government—indeed from the Premier to the Treasurer down. We collectively make sure that our economy is strong. As a state we like to build things. Manufacturing is a very important part of our workforce, and we want to continue that trend. We want to make sure that the economy stays strong. One of the ways we can do that is to come up with great budgets. The Treasurer and the Premier on this occasion have done it yet again—made sure that we have the best budget that we can have.

This year has been like no other, and obviously the Treasurer has delivered a very fair and a very smart budget, which truly has a focus on investments into infrastructure to support Victorians through these unprecedented times. As he has stated, at the heart of our economic recovery must be job creation, and that is what this budget will do. This budget is built on jobs. We are making significant investments in our workforce, and this budget will boost workforce participation and support vulnerable workers. We just recently spoke on a very important industrial relations bill which will go a long way to protecting those vulnerable workers as well.

The heart of this budget is a jobs plan package that will create more than 400,000 new jobs by 2025. This budget is truly a budget for the people of Victoria, and it will create opportunities for every Victorian going forward. This government is truly reaching every corner of the state and delivering for Victorians, and certainly there is a lot of hard work that goes on within caucus. I know the caucus members on this side have worked incredibly hard, especially during what has been a very trying time for our local communities, to liaise with their constituencies and deliver the message to our government on what our local communities are really needing right now. I have got so many things to say about my electorate, and I want to refer to some of those things in my notes here.

Education is obviously a big winner not only in my electorate but right throughout the state, and I know that every member will get up and have something tremendous to say about the educational investments that are going on in their individual electorates. I want to start by thanking the Minister for Education, who has done a power of work in making sure that we have the best education system that we can have. That is why our numberplates indicate that we are the Education State, and that is truly something that we need. If we want to grow our economy, we have got to have a strong education system, and that is why we have invested yet again so much money into it: $1.9 billion in schools, including 123 school upgrades, and $389 million to support improvements at 39 specialist schools across Victoria.

I am proud to say I have got one of those specialist schools. Nelson Park is a wonderful school, and we invested heavily in it for obvious reasons. As we recover we want our state to come back stronger than ever, delivering the biggest investment in inclusive education in our state’s history, and this includes $10 million for Nelson Park School to deliver the next stage of the school’s master plan, supporting students and the wider school community. This follows on from previous budget announcements in 2016–17, which saw the school receive some $2.5 million for capital improvements.

One of the other good news stories in my electorate about education is the investment that we are making in Northern Bay secondary school. As kids get back into the classroom, this budget delivers, obviously, our single biggest investment ever in our schools, making sure our students have the classrooms, libraries and learning spaces they deserve. This includes $15.31 million for my Northern Bay P–12 College to deliver the next stage of the school’s master plan at the Goldsworthy Road 9–12 campus.
The government’s investment will also support local jobs, with the school infrastructure build expected to create more than 6400 jobs across the state. That is very important—to make sure that we have a strong build program, as we do, and infrastructure is our game. We are investing in infrastructure more than the federal government—over $100 billion worth of infrastructure over the next decade, which is a fantastic result, obviously. This infrastructure spend will create many jobs across the state. Following the $690,000 announced through the Infrastructure Planning and Acceleration Fund the Victorian government is providing a further $15.3 million to Northern Bay college to deliver the next stage of the school’s master plan at the Goldsworthy Road 9–12 campus. This funding follows a previous $26.39 million, which has been spent revitalising the Northern Bay campuses. On top of this across the Lara electorate we have spent over $58.7 million across education and early education since 2014 alone.

I am so proud to see the Andrews government’s funding for Northern Bay P–12 College. I started this process as a local member some decades ago to revitalise and regenerate the northern suburbs cluster of schools. There were a number of them that were obviously not operating properly. The infrastructure was old and depleted, and it was not a pleasant place to be. That has totally turned around. The numbers of students are increasing in the five campuses in the northern parts of Geelong, and it is now a vibrant school community, which is fantastic to see. I have been extremely pleased as the local member to have worked alongside the school community every step of the way through this process. It has not been top-down; it has been through the community consultation processes with the school community, principals and school councils that we have actually determined what was needed for that area, and I am pleased to say that everyone is happy with the outcome of the investments that we have made so far.

I am also pleased to have been a part of the sod-turning event just last week on the drug and alcohol rehabilitation treatment centre in Corio. The residents in Greater Geelong and the wider Barwon region will soon have better access to specialist drug and alcohol treatment close to home, with work getting underway on a new adult residential rehabilitation facility in Corio. I say this in the most sincere way that I can. Obviously some of these facilities that we build we may not need and hopefully we do not need, like hospitals, but unfortunately we do. You need healthcare specialists to assist when Victorians have health issues. One of those issues that we really have a problem with at the moment is obviously drugs and alcohol, and having issues with drugs and alcohol means that you cannot be part of a normal society and you actually create a stressful environment for your family because of the addiction that you may have, whether it is alcohol or other drugs. So to have a facility like this is exactly what is needed in our communities, because you can put your head in the sand and pretend it does not exist, but it does exist.

This is a voluntary rehabilitation centre for those people that say ‘I’m sick of being addicted to alcohol or other drugs; I want to get clean’. This facility will go a long way, with around-the-clock clinical care. The 30-bed facility includes consulting staff and support areas and several shared spaces, including a kitchen, dining, lounge and activity areas along with an extensive outdoor deck and landscaped areas for outdoor program activities. It is part of a $52.1 million Labor government investment in three new alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation facilities in regional Victoria and once completed will provide care and support to an additional 900 Victorians every year, which is fantastic. The residential rehabilitation facilities are part of the Victorian government’s implementation of wideranging reforms across the alcohol and other drug sector, including more than $180 million as part of the Ice Action Plan and $87 million through the Drug Rehabilitation Plan. This facility is expected to be open hopefully by the end of the year, and obviously that is a fantastic thing.

Little River station—as we recover from the pandemic we are committed to building back stronger, fairer communities, which is why the budget includes funding to transform vacant rail buildings into spaces for our community. Little River locals will benefit from the restoration of spaces at Little River station, building local connection and community.
The Big Housing Build—I am so happy about this announcement, and I congratulate the Minister for Housing obviously and the Premier and the Treasurer and everybody that is involved with this massive investment in social and public housing. As a former resident of public housing I know that when people are doing it tough they need a roof over their heads, and that is exactly what social and public housing is. It is about making sure that when a Victorian is doing it tough you give them a hand up—not a handout but a hand up—and obviously then they can be a productive member of society. We are seeing, because of the pandemic obviously, that there are lots of people out there who are struggling and who do not have a roof over their head.

This Big Housing Build that we have announced—and again I thank the ministers and the Premier for their announcements—will ensure new housing is built where it is urgently needed. It is so important to make sure that we build it in the areas where we certainly need it. I know that I have a huge area within my electorate that has a lot of social and public housing. About $180 million will be spent in the Greater Geelong area to build these very important investments into social and public housing. It is part of a $5.3 billion package which will create a lot of jobs along the way, and that is what it is about; it is about helping the community when they need it but also helping the economy through the infrastructure that will be built.

This year’s budget will also deliver $2 billion towards Geelong fast rail, reducing travel times and supporting more passengers on the state’s busiest regional rail line, which is fantastic.

The Good Money store—funding is provided to the Good Money stores in Collingwood, Geelong, Dandenong and Morwell to support vulnerable Victorians experiencing financial hardship by building their financial capacity and security.

Skilling the Bay—there is funding over two calendar years for continuation of the school-based Skilling the Bay program, which supports students in the Geelong region to prepare for the world of work in a changing economic environment. This is part of an overall budget package of $6.9 million, which is fantastic.

The Geelong Project—this funding over three financial years is for the continuation of the Geelong Project, which is an early intervention approach to support students at risk of disengagement and/or homelessness. It is part of an overall budget package of $6.9 million.

Looking after those with end-of-life care needs, Anam Cara House will receive $5 million towards a new 20-bed private respite service offering an alternative to hospital. A grant will be provided to contribute to the construction of the 20-bed private respite service to help meet end-of-life care needs and offer an alternative to hospital and home-based care, which is so important. We turned the sod on that just a couple of weeks ago as well.

Women’s and children’s hospitals—$3.6 million will go towards planning and designing a new women’s and children’s hospital at University Hospital in Geelong, meaning that we can meet the growing demand for maternity and children’s services.

Geelong Arts Centre—there is $0.5 million for the Geelong Arts Centre to help manage its stage 3 development service disruptions.

For Kardinia Park—one of my favourites, of course—$40.16 million will go into the stage 5 redevelopment, which will come full circle to finish that very important stadium. Once it is finished it will be the MCG of regional Australia. I am so proud of it. When you consider that this is in addition to the $100 million that we announced, it is a total package of $142 million to make sure that we get it right. That will hopefully be finished over the next couple of years.

There are so many other important announcements. I have got pages and pages of announcements here, and I am always pleased whenever budget time comes around. Geelong is looked after because it is the second most important economy that we have in Victoria. At the start of 2020 we faced a devastating bushfire season and weeks later a global pandemic. A once-in-100-year event arrived at our doorstep,
and as a government we have looked after families and taken care of Victorians and their loved ones. We are building strong and connected communities, setting our state up for a strong recovery and of course a stronger and fairer Victoria that will create opportunities for as many people in the state as possible. That is why I am proud of this budget. Obviously, as every government member has said, we are so proud of this budget. I commend this budget to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (18:52): It is my pleasure to rise and speak on the take-note motion on the 2020–21 budget papers. As the Premier and Treasurer have made clear, this is a budget to repair, recover and make us stronger than ever before. This is a budget for putting people first, particularly following the once-in-a-century COVID pandemic. As Victorians start to get back to work, visit family and friends across the state and head out, we know our transport system will get busier and busier.

In June I became the Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I am very honoured to lead such an important portfolio which will make sure we have an integrated transport system going forward. There is no doubt that COVID-19 has been the biggest disruptor we have seen to how people move around, particularly Victorians. But COVID-19 does present an opportunity for us to come back better, to have more space for health—which I know you are passionate about, Acting Speaker Carbines, as Parliamentary Secretary for Health—and to really make sure we also reap all the economic benefits and social benefits we can through an integrated public transport system.

There can be no more important priority than keeping our roads safe, whether for people driving motor vehicles, on motorbikes, on foot or indeed on a bicycle. We are investing almost $400 million in rolling out new technologies, monitoring key intersections, making sure clearways actually are clearways and introducing more data and technology on our public transport and road system. We are rolling out 700 CCTV cameras, 200 wireless travel sensors and 400 permanent message boards to really make sure that our road network is monitored and that we have real-time data to support Victorians moving around as they get back to work.

Acting Speaker Carbines, I also know you are passionate about active transport and I know you know the benefits—that every kilometre cycled or walked has an enormous economic benefit for the state, whether it is reduced traffic congestion, lower vehicle costs, improved health or improvements for the environment. We know we can do more in this area though. Some 50 per cent of car journeys are less than 5 kilometres. The United Nations has said that we need about 20 per cent of our transport budget dedicated to non-motorised transport.

In fact only 5 per cent of work trips are by means of active transport. We also know from an equity point of view that when it comes to cycling there has been an over-representation in the statistics of people on bikes in the death toll. Sadly we saw almost a 300 per cent increase last year of serious injury or death resulting from people riding bikes. That is why I am very pleased to partner with the Amy Gillett Foundation and Bicycle Network to ensure we can do the 1-metre rule and also ensure, too, that we are really conscientious when it comes to public transport, the road network and people on bikes throughout our community.

I am also very proud—the only steel wheels I knew out in my electorate were those on the 59 tram—of the unprecedented investment in our tram network: $1.48 billion to build 100 new modern accessible trams that will really help our ageing tram fleet. We know there has been report after report on disability access when it comes to our tram network. This is about making sure you do the design on the stations but also, too, that you have the appropriate low-floor tram network rolling stock. I am very proud as the Minister for Public Transport that we will be doing this and making sure that our tram network is fit for purpose. This is a massive investment. The tram network is something that is iconic to Melbourne: that ding-ding that the member for Burwood so eloquently put in his inaugural speech—I can still remember it—on the importance of the tram network.
We also know that there is so much we can do for public transport. We have the Welcome Back campaign. We know one person per 4 square metres is the desired density of people to reduce the chances of infection, but peak-hour public transport has increased this by a factor of eight. To meet physical-distancing requirements, passenger loadings on public transport must be managed. That is why we are investing in pop-up lanes for our bicycles on those busy intersection areas in our public transport network. We do know biking has emerged as one way to sustainably maintain physical distancing during the pandemic and post the pandemic.

Since I was elected in 2014, my electorate of Niddrie has literally gone from seeing zero dollars of investment in education to tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure in school buildings. I am very proud that since we came to office, under the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and my advocacy, we have reached almost $50 million being provided to schools in Niddrie. This is really making an investment in the future for some of our most-needed schools, particularly Western Autistic School, Avondale Primary, Keilor Heights Primary, Niddrie Primary, Rosehill Secondary and Essendon Keilor College. I could not be more proud of building the Education State in my local community.

I want to conclude by thanking my electorate staff. They do a wonderful job—Jackie, Stefan and Emily. We very much know, particularly during the pandemic, that as MPs we drew upon our resources more than ever. If anything, as an MP we were the local legal advice shop, the local insurer, the local GP. We were generally the ones that were providing all the communication to the community. I know in my electorate of Niddrie, postcode 3042, we went into lockdown in the very early stages. I thank my electorate office staff.

I also thank the community, in the remaining time I have, for their support. We are still supporting the local community with masks. We are still supporting them in every way we can with any knowledge they need or any support or assistance. We are getting lots of inquiries at the moment from those with relatives overseas. It is very important that we do lend that helping hand and support them.

This budget is really about putting people first, but more than that, too, it is about building back better and making sure in a truly Labor way—whether it is the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, whether it is record investment in roads and infrastructure, whether it is putting jobs at the heart of everything we do—that this budget will deliver the means and the support to make sure that the Andrews government keeps on delivering.

In the remaining moments, can I also acknowledge and wish the Premier well in his recovery. Our thoughts are with his wife, his family and him. The Deputy Premier is doing a marvellous job. We have already had a scalp today. It is wonderful. I no longer have a shadow roads minister—I look forward to finding out who that will be in the coming 24 hours. This is a budget for people, and it is about putting people first.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE MANSFIELD UNIT

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (19:00): (5758) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for funding to be made available to establish a new and modern facility at the Mansfield SES facility having consideration also for other emergency services’ requirements in town, the CFA and the ambulance—and the ambulance is in desperate need also of a new facility. Mansfield is a growth pocket and it is really imperative that funding is provided to make sure that we can establish the SES. They need a new facility and they need to be part of an emergency services precinct. Now, in recent times the new Mansfield council have worked to try and establish an
emergency services precinct, and funding needs to be made available now so this can happen within the next 12 months rather than the next 24 months. Mansfield itself is full of innovation and ideas about what can be done better, and the community are very solid on the need for an emergency services precinct. The SES itself are in desperate need of an upgrade. They do things a little bit differently there, so not only do they do the regular SES activities that people might think of but, being in the High Country, they also do a lot of work in the Alpine National Park and the forests surrounding it and also Lake Eildon. They do not just have trucks, but they have a couple of water vessels as well, which is a little bit unusual. They certainly do things a little bit differently there.

At the moment they are located on council land on the old saleyards site in the middle of town. Now, I have visited this facility many times and met with the members of the SES, and they are very keen for upgraded premises, because it is very well known—and I understand that the government also know—how high a priority this need is. An analysis of Mansfield shire’s annual report in 2019 shows that the SES do over 8000 hours a year, with half a million dollars worth of services—55 per cent of the services are for state assets, such as forests, roads and waterways—and certainly a lot of emergency support for the tourist industry. They pretty well operate, as all SESs do, for 24 hours a day and are free for the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning for a lot of the work that they do with DELWP.

Now, I have raised this in Parliament a number of times dating back to 2015 because this is really important. The government need to work with the council and the SES to make sure that they establish an emergency services precinct and an appropriate facility, an appropriate modern facility, that can house all of the gear that they have—they have a lot. This matter is of the highest priority, and I urge the minister to put money in this budget rather than the following budget to get this established and moving.

KINDER TICK

Mr Brayne (Nepean) (19:03): (5759) The action I seek is for the Minister for Early Childhood to provide an update to my community on the Kinder Tick initiative and how this will benefit families in the electorate of Nepean. The rollout of Kinder Tick is set to benefit Victorian families and help them identify approved and funded kindergartens in their local area, ensuring their children enjoy the benefits of a kindergarten program. I have a lot of great preschools in the seat of Nepean, many of which I have been able to visit to meet the kids and read some books. I am thrilled that we will be able to hold an Easter egg hunt at Rye Preschool on 31 March and at Waterfall Gully Preschool on 1 April, and thank you to both Julie at Rye Preschool and Tamar at Waterfall Gully for helping us to organise those. If you want your preschool to have an Easter egg hunt next year, please contact the office. I would also be curious to know how many members of Parliament can say that they went to kinder in their electorate.

I attended Balnarring Pre-School in Nepean when I was a child and remember it very, very fondly. I look forward to updating local families on the minister’s response and to letting them know how the Kinder Tick initiative will benefit them on the Mornington Peninsula.

TELEHANDLER TRAINING

Ms Kealy (Lowan) (19:04): (5760) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Workplace Safety, and the action I seek is to urgently amend relevant telehandler regulations to make telehandler licensing and training options for Victorian farmers and export hay companies more relevant, appropriate and affordable and of course in line with national requirements. Matters around telehandler training go back two years—in fact I first raised this matter with the then Minister for Agriculture on 22 January 2019. I still continue to be contacted by concerned constituents regarding excessive training requirements for the legal operation of telehandlers on Victorian farms. In the past the Minister for Agriculture has assured me and my constituents that there are going to be changes in place that will make sure that telehandler licensing is made more appropriate, and I quote:

This change has imposed additional training requirements and costs to Victorian farmers. I have directed my department to work with WorkSafe Victoria and the Victorian Farmers Federation to look more closely at the changes. It is important to minimise the regulatory burden while ensuring we maintain safe telehandler use, given agriculture is recognised as a high-risk activity.
But the problem is that Victoria currently is in a situation where we require a crane licence to operate a telehandler with a capacity of 3 tonnes or more with forks. I refer now to a letter from Australian Exporters Company, written by Mark Heaslip, who is the AEXCO chairman and who cites that:

To obtain a crane license an individual being trained needs to be taught to operate equipment and complete tasks that are not relevant to use of a telehandler in an agricultural/export hay company setting.

The export hay companies are strong supporters of training and accreditation to improve safety outcomes. The export hay companies, however, believe it is important the training needs to relevant to use of specific plant in various industries. To emphasize this point I would like to provide you with following example. Prior to completing a Telehandler non slew greater than 3 tonne (CN Licence) individuals need to have completed the high risk licence to perform dogging course. The dogging course is completed over five days and involves being trained on a slewing crane which no export hay company employees are required to operate in their normal workplace.

So you have got regulations that are training you and requiring you to be trained on a completely different piece of equipment than they actually will be operating in practicality, whether you are in a hay export company or on the farm. We need to make sure that we provide an appropriate and safe course for telehandler use. Otherwise farmers are not going to send their staff or themselves off to these courses or they are not going to know what the risks are around using a telehandler on their property.

So I ask the minister: this has been going on for two years now; it is time to urgently act and to make sure that the regulations in Victoria around telehandler use and training are appropriate and fair.

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**TARNEIT ELECTORATE BUS SERVICES**

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (19:07): (5761) My adjournment is directed towards the Minister for Public Transport. The action I seek is that the minister update me on the designs for the new bus routes coming to Tarneit and Truganina in May. New and developing estates in Tarneit and Truganina will soon receive two new bus routes to take them directly to Tarneit train station. As I understand it, letters will be going out to residents alerting them where new bus stops will be set up. This has been the result of a fantastic community campaign to see these new buses come to both Tarneit and Truganina.

Route 152 will travel between Williams Landing station and Tarneit station via Allura Estate and route 182 will travel from Werribee station to Tarneit station via new estates in Tarneit West along Davis and Leakes roads. These new routes will be absolutely life-changing for the families living in these communities, whether they are going to work or to school or just down to the shops. That is why I would gladly welcome an update from the minister on where we are at with these brand new bus routes.

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**DISPUTE SETTLEMENT CENTRE OF VICTORIA**

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (19:08): (5762) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, who I note is at the table. The action I seek is for the minister to provide me in writing with advice as to when the Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria will resume taking telephone calls and attending to the backlog of issues being raised by members of the public. Earlier this week an 83-year-old constituent rang my office regarding a fencing dispute with her neighbour. She had previously rung the local council about this matter. The council had in turn rung the Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria, but was unable to get through. As my constituent does not have a computer and is not computer literate, the council staff eventually logged a DSCV online form on her behalf. The issue was logged almost two weeks ago and at the time a response was given that, quote, ‘We will provide a response within two business days’.

It is now over five business days later and still my constituent has heard nothing back from DSCV. In order to advance this issue, one of my staff called DSCV and was shocked to hear a prerecorded message advising that the centre is not taking any calls and is encouraging people to ask for assistance electronically. My constituent is now extremely concerned that no assistance is available to her from the DSCV, the very body established to help her, and that the conflict with her neighbour will remain unresolved. This is far from a satisfactory situation for any Victorian. Consequently, I look forward to
the minister providing this important information as soon as possible and thank her in anticipation of receiving this written advice.

**MONASH DEMONS**

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (19:10): (5763) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to contact Peter Willoughby of the Monash Demons all-abilities football club to congratulate him on receiving life membership of the Football Integration Development Association, or FIDA.

The Monash Demons are an all-abilities football club playing out of Jordan Reserve in my electorate. FIDA provide Victorians with an intellectual impairment with the opportunity to participate in AFL, or Australian Rules football, and it does, can I say, an amazing job. FIDA first organised matches in 1991 following two clinics run by the Hawthorn Football Club and the Hawthorn city council—now Boroondara—in the late 1980s. Thirty years later there are now 25 clubs and approximately 800 players in the league. Last month I went down to Jordan Reserve for the Monash Demons tryouts day. It was great fun firing up the barbie and watching the footy get kicked around. It was also a great honour to join FIDA vice-president Peter Fisher in awarding the Monash Demons president, Peter Willoughby, with his lifetime membership of the league.

It is no secret that you will find many heroes in the arena of community sport. There are thousands of volunteers across Victoria who work tirelessly to keep the games they love alive in their communities. Victoria is the sporting capital of the nation, not just in the diversity of sports, leagues and codes but also in the value we place on participation and inclusion. As Victorians we do not just champion the professionals playing in front of the tens of thousands, we show up, cheer and support all levels of the games we love.

Peter Willoughby does an amazing job of bringing the Demons together. The players come from a range of backgrounds and living situations, from youngsters who are brought to training and games by their proud parents through to all the players who live in specialist disability accommodation and who are kept involved in the league through the support of Peter and the rest of the team. Peter came to me for help last year. He was worried about keeping some of the players involved when it comes to away games, which can be as far away as Ballarat and Bendigo. It required much manoeuvring to arrange carpooling for players who did not have friends and family who could drive them to games, and sometimes that meant missing out. I connected Peter with the local neighbourhood house, Amaroof, who were happy to lend their bus to the Demons for those away games. This means all Demons players, no matter their circumstances, can go to every away game, riding in the bus next to their teammates. Local champions like Peter help locals participate and use local resources to do it. It is local sport and local communities at their very best, and I look forward to the minister making that contact with Peter Willoughby.

**HOSPITAL ENERGY SUPPLY**

Dr READ (Brunswick) (19:13): (5764) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the government to build the new Footscray Hospital and all subsequent new hospitals so that they can run on 100 per cent electricity and without fossil gas. This will allow these hospitals to run entirely on renewable energy.

Hospitals built today will still be running well beyond 2050, by which time Victoria has legislated to achieve net zero emissions, and given the severity of recent climate-driven fires, droughts and heatwaves in Victoria and around the world and the fact that we are approaching climate tipping points already, Victorians may soon be demanding that we achieve net zero emissions well before then. Hospitals consume large amounts of energy, so any reduction in carbon emissions necessarily involves them. Buying and installing expensive gas pipelines, heaters and boilers will look short-sighted when we have to rip them out and replace them with heat pumps and reverse-cycle air conditioners.
The negative health impacts of burning fossil fuels and of climate change are profound, and our hospitals and how they are run must be part of the solution rather than adding to the problem. This is why a large and growing number of hospital staff are already worried that their work is contributing to climate change. What does building a hospital powered by fossil gas tell them? And we know that unless Victoria reduces gas consumption we will still soon be importing more and more fossil gas from fracking fields in our northern states. Fracking leaks more methane into the atmosphere, making fracked gas as bad or worse for the climate than coal.

Soon gas heating will be seen as the equivalent of having briquette heating, and nobody would put that in a new hospital. Hospital staff tell me that they despair at this government’s sluggishness in moving the hospital sector to clean energy. The ACT has announced that it will run its new hospital entirely on 100 per cent electricity, using electric heat pumps instead of fossil gas heating. The Victorian government has just announced a program to support low-income earners to switch away from gas heating, so we should do the same in our hospitals, and the easiest place to start is in the hospitals that we are about to build, like Footscray’s new hospital.

**COBURG HARRIERS ATHLETIC CLUB**

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (19:15): (5765) The action I seek is that the Minister for Government Services accompany me on a visit to the Coburg Harriers Athletic Club to see firsthand their collection of historical photographs and memorabilia. The club have recently submitted an application for support to the Public Record Office Victoria’s local history grants program. This year marks the club’s 125-year anniversary, and they are seeking a grant to facilitate an exhibition of their historical collection. This club has been home to Olympians such as Raelene Boyle and Herb Elliott and is a treasure trove of sporting history. The Coburg Harriers Athletic Club has a long and rich 125-year history spanning from 1896 to 2021, and the club operates out of the Harold Stevens Athletic Track in Coburg North. I was very pleased to visit there with them and look at some of their memorabilia last week.

The club prides itself on being an inclusive, accessible, supportive and connected community which has boasted inspiring competitive success from the grassroots to the Olympic level. Both Raelene and Herb are national living treasures, as described by the National Trust of Australia, and legends of Australian sport as awarded by the Sport Australia Hall of Fame. Today the track welcomes a variety of participants, from Coburg Little Athletics and the Harriers to hosting social and recreational running opportunities, training and local school athletics competitions. The club motto is ‘Not the quarry but the chase, not the trophy but the race’, and they are known for their annual 24-hour race, which is coming up—a 24-hour run-as-far-as-you-can competition, with runners running consistently around the track from 12 midday to 12 midday.

As I said, last week I visited the club and took a tour of the Harold Stevens track and clubrooms to look at their facilities and to meet with club president Michael Carney and vice-president Mark Burns to tour the facilities and learn more about the club’s history and their proud vision for the future. Walking through the clubrooms, the strong and diverse history of the Coburg Harriers is very clear, with many photographs, items of memorabilia and uniforms that tell a unique story of our local sporting past and of social and political changes and events through time. The club has a vision to share this story widely with our local community through their recent submission to the Public Record Office Victoria’s local history grants program. They have applied for a grant to support a local exhibition featuring a video documentary in celebrating their 125th anniversary. The exhibition would display the photos and memorabilia and would track the progression of the club through time from an originally male-only club to the development of the inclusive local sporting club they are today. An exhibition would also provide the club with the chance to honour the contribution of their key members and community and to share their impact with the local area. The club would greatly appreciate the opportunity to show the minister their collection and speak with him about the impact that this exhibition could make to our local community.
STUDENT DEVICES

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (19:18): (5766) My adjournment is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that he review any decision made to require school computers to be signed over to families for their exclusive use without full and proper compensation for schools that have fundraised to buy them originally. I have been contacted by a couple of schools, but I am going to particularly refer to the Waubra Primary School. They have been contacted by the Department of Education and Training saying that the computers that the students were using during remote learning are to be permanently signed over to them, but in the case of Waubra and many small country primary schools they were actually bought by parental fundraising. The idea is they buy them and they last for a series of years and the kids use them when they are at the school, so it is a real problem for this school and others to have because, firstly, only $180 is being offered in compensation for $700 computers, but also, they need the computers at the school. It seems to me that this is another case of the government thinking that this was government money and they were going to create this program to give these computers out. But the problem is in many country schools there just is not enough room in the budget for them to be buying things like computers and so the parents have fundraised, and now they are stuck in a situation where they are going to have to fundraise again two years earlier than they normally would to be able to replace these computers for the whole school. So that seems to me entirely unfair, and I would ask the minister to reverse that decision.

DOOREN RSL SUB-BRANCH

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (19:20): (5767) I rise to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Veterans in the other place, being the Legislative Council, and the action I seek is for him to visit the Yan Yean electorate and in particular the Doreen sub-branch of the RSL. The Doreen RSL sub-branch is the youngest sub-branch in the country, and it is about equidistant between Puckapunyal and Simpson Barracks. We have not just recent veterans but also serving personnel who have been involved in the Afghanistan conflict, Iraq and others, but particularly the Afghanistan conflict, which is the longest conflict that Australia has ever been involved in.

What I have seen for a number of years is that there is inadequate support, particularly mental health support, for veterans both during their tenure in the armed forces and once they exit the armed forces, and it is really individuals like our GPs and like the principals of the local schools that are providing the support for these military people and their families. For anyone that read the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System’s report that was tabled in the last sitting week, there is an enormous impact for those that have been affected by trauma, whether it is childhood trauma or whether it is trauma in their work as emergency services personnel or I think with the ADF.

I am really proud that our government at a state level is responding by supporting police and emergency services personnel and providing them with the support they need, but what I find is that the defence force personnel that live in the Yan Yean electorate are not identified and are just ignored by the federal government. I am really proud of the Labor friends of veterans that are going to come together tomorrow to launch themselves as a pressure group to try and improve things for our veterans. I know that the Minister for Veterans in the other place really understands the plight of these veterans, and I know that in particular the Doreen sub-branch of the RSL, being the youngest sub-branch in the country, its president Wes Wridgway and others understand the difficult plight of these veterans. I think that we can work together— (Time expired)

RESPONSES

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (19:23): In relation to the matter that the member for Forest Hill raised, I am advised that the dispute settlement services ran during the course of the pandemic and have returned to normal services, but I am happy to get the details of the constituent and actually provide the member with some written advice, as requested, on that.
In relation to other matters, the member for Eildon raised a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services; the member for Nepean raised a matter for the Minister for Early Childhood; the member for Lowan raised a matter for the Minister for Workplace Safety; the member for Tarneit raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport; the member for Burwood raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport; the member for Brunswick raised a matter for the Minister for Health; the member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Government Services; the member for Ripon raised a matter for the Minister for Education; and the member for Yan Yean raised a matter for Minister for Veterans, and I will refer them accordingly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7.25 pm.