



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 17 May 2023

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Bronwyn Halfpenny,
Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Daniel Andrews

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Jacinta Allan

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren	South Barwon	ALP	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Fowles, Will	Ringwood	ALP	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Wayne Farnham	Narracan	Lib	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

CONTENTS

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	1683
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	1683
COMMITTEES	
Joint select committee	1684
Establishment	1684
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club	1685
3rd Cavalry Regiment (Vietnam) Association	1685
Murray Plains electorate roads	1686
IDAHOBIT	1686
Local government planning	1686
Aintree Primary School	1686
State Emergency Service volunteers	1687
Buxton Primary School	1687
Tarneit electorate schools	1687
IDAHOBIT	1687
Oakleigh Village	1688
Euroa electorate volunteers	1688
Power saving bonus	1688
George Primrose	1689
IDAHOBIT	1689
5k for 5k challenge	1690
Kew electorate schools	1690
Miners Rest sports facility	1690
IDAHOBIT	1690
Frankston electorate education	1691
Power saving bonus	1691
Highton Library	1691
Cambodian elections	1691
Point Cook football clubs	1692
STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS	
Integrity and Oversight Committee	1692
The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate	1692
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee	1693
Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022	1693
Integrity and Oversight Committee	1694
The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate	1694
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	1695
Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor- General's Office	1695
Integrity and Oversight Committee	1696
The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate	1696
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Exford Primary School bus crash	1697
Notices of motion	1700
BILLS	
Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023	1700
Statement of compatibility	1700
Second reading	1702
Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023	1710
Statement of compatibility	1710
Second reading	1712
Gambling Taxation Bill 2023	1713
Second reading	1713
MOTIONS	
Safe Schools	1718
MEMBERS	

Minister for Mental Health	1730
Absence	1730
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Federal health funding.....	1730
Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ equality.....	1731
Ambulance services.....	1732
Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ support	1732
Level crossing removals	1733
Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ support	1734
Cost of living.....	1735
Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ support	1736
Federal roads funding.....	1736
Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ support	1737
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Eildon electorate	1738
Tarneit electorate	1738
Mildura electorate.....	1738
Thomastown electorate	1738
Mornington electorate	1738
Hastings electorate.....	1739
Richmond electorate.....	1739
Yan Yean electorate	1739
Narracan electorate.....	1739
Ringwood electorate.....	1740
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Constituency questions	1740
MOTIONS	
Safe Schools.....	1740
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE	
Economic policy	1753
MOTIONS	
Safe Schools.....	1777
ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Victorian Parliamentary Former Members Association.....	1777
BILLS	
Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.....	1778
Second reading.....	1778
ADJOURNMENT	
HAMR Energy.....	1788
State Emergency Service Chelsea unit	1789
Shepparton electorate schools	1790
Truganina estates	1790
Mooroolbark–Hull roads, Mooroolbark.....	1791
State Emergency Service Whittlesea unit	1791
State Emergency Service Malvern and Port Phillip units.....	1792
Suburban Rail Loop	1792
Benambra electorate roads.....	1793
Ballarat International Foto Biennale.....	1793
Responses.....	1794

Wednesday 17 May 2023

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Notice given.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Supporting Sexual and Reproductive Health – Ordered to be published.

John Pesutto: I seek leave to make a statement –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Is leave granted?

Jacinta Allan: It is really hard, Speaker, to know what leave is being granted for given the government has been given no advice about what leave is being asked for –

Leave refused.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition leaned across the table and mentioned that he is seeking leave in relation to a terrible, terrible incident that happened yesterday. He only wants to take 30 seconds, and I would ask the government if they would reconsider. He is asking for 30 seconds to talk about a terrible incident that has happened in Victoria, which I am sure the whole house would like to speak on.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. There is not a point of order there.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, it is normal practice in this chamber for a conversation to have occurred when we are talking about terrible tragedies and events such as we have witnessed. The least one would have expected from the opposition is for them to consult with the member whose constituents have been dreadfully impacted. I request that that conversation happen between the Manager of Opposition Business and me and we come back to this house with a way forward on how to appropriately acknowledge the community that has been impacted.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not hear any more on the point of order. The point of order has been ruled on. Leave has not been granted, and there is a commitment by the Leader of the House to engage with the Manager of Opposition Business to seek a way forward through this.

Michael O'Brien: On a different point of order, Speaker, yesterday when the house was debating one of the gambling bills the member for Melton quite rightly used that opportunity to discuss the tragic bus crash and did so with the full support of me as the shadow minister at the table as a courtesy. There is precedent for the house to divert from normal activity to deal with a very important matter, and that courtesy was very willingly extended to the member for Melton by me yesterday –

The SPEAKER: I understand, member for Malvern –

Michael O'Brien: and I would ask the government to extend the same courtesy to the Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER: I would ask you to resume your seat.

Jacinta Allan: On that point of order, Speaker, there are many of us who have been in the house for a little while longer than the member for Hawthorn – I do not want to start naming former managers of opposition business who are in the house today – but it is deeply discourteous not just to the house but to the families in the community of Melton. We would be very happy, as the Leader of the House has indicated, to have an appropriate moment of reflection. You do not do that. We do not do that.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta Allan: Oh, my goodness. There are families right now grieving because their children have been injured in a really awful bus accident and the Leader of the Opposition has, instead of using what are fairly standard practices of the house, outside of this chamber – and I will look at the member for Rowville. He knows well how to do these things properly and respectfully, both to the house and to the communities and families concerned. I think this speaks more –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Jacinta Allan: I think the interjections and the approach speak more to what the opposition think is about them than what is actually about a really serious matter at hand. The discourtesy that is being shown to the house right now really says it all. There will be an appropriate moment, if the opposition wish to engage in the appropriate forms, to have this incident recognised in the house. Jumping up with no notice, with no courtesy, with no advice across the chamber, is not the way that you respect communities who are going through a tough time.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! No, I will not hear any more members on this matter. On the point of order put forth by the Leader of the Opposition, leave has not been granted. However – and I will not hear any more on this; no, I will not – there is a way forward and I would encourage the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business to come together to discuss after we have passed this moment.

Committees

Joint select committee

Establishment

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:42): I desire to move, by leave, notice of motion 12, standing in my name, relating to a committee inquiry specifically into the sexual abuse of children in Victorian government schools:

That:

- (1) A joint select committee be appointed to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament by 30 November 2023 on the systemic sexual abuse of children in Victorian government schools, including:
 - (a) the practices, policies and protocols in Victorian government schools for responding to allegations of sexual abuse of children, including measures put in place to respond to concerns about sexual abuse in those schools;
 - (b) a proposal on how the government should provide an appropriate institutional response to the matters considered.
- (2) In undertaking the inquiry, the committee should not encroach upon the responsibilities of investigatory agencies or the courts in relation to particular cases, nor prejudice the conduct or outcome of investigations or court proceedings.

- (3) Such committee to consist of four members from the Legislative Assembly nominated by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business and three members from the Legislative Council nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council; and that the overall composition of the committee should be not more than three government members, three opposition members, and one cross-bench member.
- (4) The members to be appointed by lodgement of the names with the Speaker and President no later than 24 March 2023.
- (5) A message be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

Motion defeated.

Members statements

Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:43): On 16 July 2021 I had the great privilege of writing to the Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club congratulating them on their successful \$11.35 million allocation in that year's budget for the restoration of their iconic building. The club is one of the largest in Victoria and is an amazing asset for the Williamstown community. Members provide important skills and services, and during the summer months many a Melburnian makes their way to Williamstown for a day at the beach under the safe, watchful eye of the Williamstown group. The contribution to safety and of course the local economy is immense. So nearly two years on from that letter congratulating them, I wish I was here marking the completion of the works. Unfortunately the club and I are bitterly disappointed with the Hobsons Bay City Council executive, who have never prioritised this important project in this vital community organisation. The council have never wanted to complete this much-needed and wanted community asset and have had to be dragged the whole way. The failure to prioritise and the delay in planning have seen cost increases skyrocket as Hobsons Bay City Council executives sat on their hands. I have been informed that due to the delays the scope of these works has had to change in order for the council to finally get on and do something for the club. It is bitterly disappointing that the hardworking committee and volunteers of the lifesaving club and the Williamstown community have been delayed and are missing out on this community asset.

3rd Cavalry Regiment (Vietnam) Association

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:44): I raise the concerns today of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment (Vietnam) Association Inc. and particularly Michael Thompson, who has worked tirelessly to add a new cenotaph to the armoured Australian Light Horse memorial at Tongala. For the second year running Tongala has been unsuccessful in their funding application to add a new cenotaph to the memorial there. Last year their application was unsuccessful because VicTrack had not signed the lease for the land on which some of the memorial is situated. They then submitted the same application again this year with the additional information that VicTrack had signed the lease, but they were unsuccessful again, this time because the grants program team at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing said they should have applied under the Victoria Remembers grant program rather than the Restoring Community War Memorials and Avenues of Honour grant program.

What concerns Michael and that group is that nothing was said last year about the fact that they should have applied for a different grant program. If they had been told that, they would have changed the application to that new grant program. Another year has been lost, and the cost of those works are increasing at a fast rate. I urge the Minister for Veterans to ensure that clear advice is actually given to unsuccessful grant applicants so that they can increase their chances of success next year.

Murray Plains electorate roads

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:45): On another matter, there are a number of roads in my electorate that desperately need funding in the budget, particularly the Loddon Valley Highway at the Appin South turn-off, where there has been a 40-kilometre restriction now for literally years, and I urge the government to fix those roads.

IDAHOBIT

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (09:46): Today is IDAHOBIT day. As a young boy doing ballet in the 1970s and 80s and as a young adult in the 90s, the conclusion from a lot of people was that I must be homosexual just because I did ballet. What a weird idea. What a long bow to draw. But because of that I was on the receiving end of bigotry, hatred, abuse and occasionally violence, and it always perplexed me. I never understood what the fear was about, why people would feel like this and why they felt it was okay to force their opinions on me. I was lucky that I was pretty secure in who I was and was able to navigate all that fear and hatred and ignorance fairly unscathed, but I am acutely aware of how horrific this must be for those that are deeply scarred by this fear and ignorance, those that are searching for their identity in a world that refuses to accept them and those that know who they are but feel they must hide themselves away. I stand here now and say that in 2023 it is totally unacceptable, and in my view it always has been. Today is the day where we stand together and say enough is enough. Today is the day we stand side by side with love and acceptance for all of the diverse people in our community. Today is the day we stand in solidarity with our LGBTQIA family, friends and queer strangers and embrace them all unconditionally. I pledge I am going to do this not only today but every day.

Local government planning

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:47): One of the many things I love about my Malvern electorate is the beauty of its streetscapes. This is a love shared by my constituents, who make suburbs like Malvern, Malvern East, Armadale, Glen Iris, Toorak and Kooyong home. We choose to live in these amazing communities because amenity matters, heritage matters and parks matter. This is why planning laws matter as well. So it is with a sense of dread that I read in the *Age* of 19 April 2023 an article headed 'State government weighs new powers to jam in 1 million more homes'. It states:

Local councils could be cut from decision-making on major development projects under a bold plan being considered by the Andrews government to help squeeze an extra million homes into Melbourne's suburbs by 2050.

Labor did not go to the last election promising to jam an extra million homes into our established suburbs. Labor has no mandate to bypass local government on local planning decisions. Councils are far from perfect, but they are closer to local residents than any state Labor government bureaucrat ever will be. When it comes to planning decisions, councils can be streamlined but they should never be sidelined. I will fight to protect the amenity of my community and the right of my local residents to have their voices heard about planning decisions that affect their homes, their streets and their community.

Aintree Primary School

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (09:49): I want to congratulate the principal Simon Cornock, the staff, the school council and the community of Aintree Primary School on reaching 1000 student enrolments. This is a significant cause for celebration and definitely one for the history books. When we talk about how fast the west is growing, Aintree Primary School gives a very clear picture. The school opened its doors in term 1 in only 2021, taking enrolments from prep to year 6, and in under 2½ years it has already reached 1000 student enrolments. The school celebrated this milestone with all students and staff to create the number 1000, which was captured in an image via a drone. This was thanks to Mr Anderson, one of the teachers, and it was a massive effort. It took over an hour to coordinate, and Mrs Slatter, another teacher, made this happen. I encourage all members of this house to go to the school's Facebook page and check out the image. It is really quite impressive.

I want to make mention of the one-thousandth student who was enrolled, Makai, from year 5. I understand that he was not only presented with a special celebration gift but also awarded 'Student of the week' in art. What a fantastic start to your journey at your new school. I want to wish all of the students at Aintree Primary School the very best, and I cannot wait to visit this school again.

State Emergency Service volunteers

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:50): Today is Wear Orange Wednesday, which has been established to acknowledge and thank SES unit volunteers. I have six SES units in my area, and they are highly valued by me and the community. They conduct a range of very diverse tasks, often in very trying conditions. Recent activity includes Mansfield SES being called out to a boat rescue on Lake Eildon and saving eight people after a capsizing. Alexandra SES played a huge role in helping the community during the 2022 floods, with 11 rescues, including seven water rescues. Marysville SES recently assisted police searching for a missing hiker in the Cathedral Range, tackling steep terrain and thick vegetation. The Upper Yarra SES volunteers received a staggering 219 requests for assistance during the floods, and the Healesville SES unit attended landslips, cleared fallen trees and provided sandbags. Kinglake SES recently helped police search for a missing person. Thank you very much to our incredible SES volunteers.

Buxton Primary School

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:51): Buxton Primary School have completed the Warrk Warrk Trail, which was started by former principal Andrew Bagnall in 2019 and followed through by current principal Sarah Irving. The school now has an interactive walking trail through its Land for Wildlife space. One of my favourite features was student artwork depicting plants and animals and the interactive QR code, which had students talking about each different native animal. Peter Weeks did a great job with the recordings. Taungurung elder Aunty Lee Healy has done so well working with the students, teaching language, and Alexandra mural artist Anna Baker did well too.

Tarneit electorate schools

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:52): Last week the new principals for Riverdale secondary college and Tarneit North primary school were announced. Congratulations to Simon Haber, who has a long history of educating and also being a principal in Tarneit, and Paul Schwartz. I am sure that you will both do an absolutely amazing job. Tarneit is one of the fastest growing regions in Victoria, so making sure that we have the facilities for all of our kids to attend the very best schools is a priority for the Andrews Labor government. That is why I am so excited to see these two new schools opening in Tarneit early next year.

Earlier this year I also had the pleasure, with the Minister for Education, of opening another two schools in the area, Nearnung and Karwan primary schools. They are fantastic schools with great staff, facilities and play equipment, which the kids have been loving so far. We have recently announced that Karwan Primary School is receiving a grant to set up a new out-of-school-hours care program, which I know will be so incredibly important for the hardworking families in my electorate of Tarneit. I am proud to be part of a government that is making quality education a priority and cannot wait to see all of these fantastic local developments.

IDAHOBIT

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (09:53): Today is International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, and I rise to stand with the LGBTIQ+ communities against the campaign of hate, this ideology of hate, that is being waged against them. This is a far-right ideology that is focused on one thing: the persecution of a minority – something we have seen time and time again throughout history. Shame on anyone in this place for giving that movement, that ideology, comfort, let alone being part of this campaign of hate.

I have been really proud to make fighting for stronger laws to protect LGBTIQ+ communities against discrimination, particularly students at faith-based schools – a priority of mine since I was first elected. But there is more to do here in Victoria. There is an urgent need right now to strengthen the state's anti-vilification laws to include vilification on the basis of sexuality and gender identity – laws that would help prevent the appalling events in recent months from ever happening again. It has been four years since these laws were first proposed in Parliament and two years since an inquiry was completed, and all we are hearing is that there is a process and it might take another 18 months. There is clearly an urgent need for these laws. I urge the government to act.

Oakleigh Village

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:55): I rise to support the traders in the Oakleigh Village shopping centre. Oakleigh Village is incredible. It has some of the best food, best hospitality, best cafes and best bars in Melbourne and Victoria. It is a shame that Monash council is moving towards a plan to remove, initially, 14 car spots from Portman Street, one of the main streets in Oakleigh, and four loading zones because they have a vision for creating outdoor dining right through Portman Street. My and the traders' message to them is: we have an extraordinary strip of outdoor dining called Eaton Mall. Portman Street, Chester Street and Atkinson Street have many other uses. They are where people go to buy meat at the butchers or do their banking or go to delis or nut shops, veg shops, hairdressing, gift shops and beauty therapy shops.

Oakleigh Village is not just a place for cafes. It is an entire village that serves the entire community. Having car spaces in Portman Street right next to those butchers and those other shops matters to customers and matters to Oakleigh Village's success. It is the same in Chester Street. The message to the council is: listen to the traders, keep the car spots, keep the place as it is, keep it clean and keep investing in infrastructure in a way that supports businesses and does not detract from businesses.

Euroa electorate volunteers

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:56): With this week being National Volunteer Week, I thought it was fitting to use my time to speak about some of the fantastic volunteer work happening in the Euroa electorate. I recently met with local legend Peter Cunningham and the Royal Flying Doctor Service patient transport team in Heathcote to hear about the work they are doing. This group of incredible volunteers offer life-saving support, with over 25,000 patients transported since 2018 in a community that is without reliable public transport, ensuring that the most vulnerable people are able to get access to essential healthcare services. While in Heathcote I also met with the CFA brigade and the SES unit, who are continuing their push for a new co-located site. Facilities for these essential volunteers should match the courage and bravery they consistently show in the face of danger.

I also want to speak about the opening of the Gargarro Botanic Garden, a truly amazing story. When the Heinz tomato factory closed in Girgarre there were concerns for the future of the town. While there was a financial offering for community wellbeing, this was declined in favour of some land and irrigation rights provided by Heinz. Thanks to an outstanding effort from a team of volunteers and community members, this garden celebrated its official opening and has already provided such a boost to the town. Gargarro brings together the passion and skills of the local community to create something lasting, meaningful, full of heart and for the benefit of all those who visit, volunteer or work there into the future. It is a great credit to the many who have played a role in making this vision a reality.

Power saving bonus

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:58): Since the introduction of the new round of the \$250 power saving bonus my office has been busy helping residents of the Lara electorate complete their online applications. As households right across Victoria are facing the high cost of living, this new round of the power saving bonus is helping them pay the bills ahead of winter. Over the last two weeks my team and I have visited all six neighbourhood houses across the Lara electorate and completed

hundreds of power saving bonus applications for the community. The residents not only benefit from the \$250 but we were able to make sure they are getting the best deal on their energy and connect them with the wonderful programs at their local neighbourhood houses.

None of this would have been possible without the help of the terrific team of volunteers at our local neighbourhood houses. I would like to say a very special thankyou to Heather, Ray and Gail at the Anakie Community House; Vivian and Yvonne at the Lara community house; Jodie and Monique at Rosewall neighbourhood centre; Esther, Bec, Audrey, Mel, Chen, Miranda, Larry, Mandy, Keith, Susan, Valentina, Stefan, Nelli, Walter, Esme and Glen from the Norlane Community Centre; Liz, Inge, Issara, Grace and the wonderful students on placement at the Cloverdale Community Centre; and Petra and Bindumil from the Vines Road Community Centre. These amazing people work hard every day to be there and deliver for their local community, and I know that the northern suburbs of Geelong are a better place because of each and every one of these people. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my team for doing so much hard work helping hundreds of people apply for their power saving bonus.

George Primrose

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:59): Every community has an absolute legend, and last week we lost a bloody ripper down in Beaconsfield, in Berwick. George Primrose was a living legend through our area. He was known by everyone. I was good friends with his son Anthony, his daughter Tanya and his wife Julie. In more recent times I used to catch up with George at the Tatts agent. We used to go down there, and there was a group of older guys there. It did make me feel pretty young hanging around with this group, whose nicknames were Knackers, Crazy – actually most of them I probably cannot repeat after that. But we used to hang around in there and talk about the wonderful times and the awesome community we are from.

This is a man who in his life never owned a pair of pants, he only ever owned shorts. He gave back to the community. He was always around for everyone, and I know how much he loved his kids. He used to come down and be the goal umpire when we played at Berwick. Now he has gone I can declare he may have cheated a little bit. If a goal looked like it was a goal and it was for Berwick, he gave it to us; if it went the other way, he might have been a bit lenient and give it to us to make sure we would have that win. He is the only man in the world that when he got out there would never, ever go the traditions of the normal goal; everything was thumbs up, because he wanted to make sure that the kids got behind him. George, you are going to be missed. Mate, what you gave back to our community we will never be able to thank you for. I know your kids are going to see it, but to you, mate, it is thumbs up. We are going to miss you and we hope to see everyone celebrate your life this Friday.

IDAHOBIT

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:01): I rise to condemn the threats and hate put forward by a small minority of hate-filled bigots towards the councillors, staff and residents of the City of Monash. Today is IDAHOBIT, the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. Monash City Council libraries organised a drag story time event to celebrate today. As with other councils across Victoria that planned to host events to celebrate IDAHOBIT, fringe groups decided to intimidate and threaten library and council staff. This behaviour is unacceptable. This behaviour was demonstrated at the last Monash City Council meeting, where councillors, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and members of the public were subjected to hate speech, threats and intimidation. I am proud to be part of an Andrews Labor government that stands with the City of Monash and our LGBTQIA+ community. We have made it clear that equality is not negotiable. We will continue to work with our queer community, our local government and Victoria Police to ensure that such events can proceed safely in the future, and we as a state government will do the work to extend our anti-vilification laws. To Monash City Council councillors and council staff: thank you for all the work you do to serve our community. We stand with you. To the LGBTQIA+ community in

my electorate, in the City of Monash and across Victoria: we hear you, we see, we love you and we stand with you.

5k for 5k challenge

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:02): Over the last two weeks I was delighted to be ambassador for the Servants Community Housing 5k for 5k challenge, an exercise challenge to raise funds for people at risk of homelessness. With four houses across Kew and Hawthorn, Servants provides a safe environment to its 95 residents and bridges the gap for those doing it tough. As part of the challenge I completed a different activity each day to involve our local community and raise much-needed funds and awareness. From almost making it to first base for the North Balwyn Stingers to climbing the 96 floors, or 1700 steps, of Australia's tallest residential building, it was inspiring to see the strong community spirit getting behind this great cause. I would like to thank Boroondara Netball Association, Giant Steps, Kew Box Hill Hockey Club, Greythorn Primary School, Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Kew Tennis Club, Balwyn Greythorn Jets Football Club and North Balwyn Stingers Baseball Club for helping me support this great cause. I would like to thank everyone who generously donated and Amanda, Jayden and the team at Servants for the amazing work that they do.

Kew electorate schools

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:03): One of the best parts of this role is speaking to young people about why our democracy and system of government is so important. I recently welcomed grades 5 and 6 students from St Anne's Primary School, Camberwell Girls School and Ruyton Girls School on their parliamentary tours. It was fantastic to have the opportunity to speak to all the students and answer their clever and challenging questions. I was incredibly impressed by their knowledge of Parliament and the insights they provided. They all have bright futures ahead of them. A special mention to Zoey and Grace from St Anne's Primary School for their heartfelt letter after the tour.

Miners Rest sports facility

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:04): Last Tuesday was one of my proudest days since being elected the member for Ripon. I joined the Deputy Premier along with students from Miners Rest Primary School and representatives from the Committee for Miners Rest to announce that the Andrews Labor government will build a brand new sports facility for Miners Rest. This is huge for Miners Rest. The growing suburb in Ballarat's north is home to almost 4000 residents, but it currently only has a supermarket, petrol station, community hall, CFA station and pub. Locals have to travel up to Learmonth or down to Ballarat to play sports and have not ever had a local option. But that is about to change, thanks to our government. The brand new sports facility will be complete by early 2025 and will include a competition-grade oval, sports pavilion, change rooms, amenities, car parking and more. It will mean Miners Rest locals will be able to play sports close to home – a massive win for kids and locals of all ages. The facility will be part of the Commonwealth Games to temporarily house the North Ballarat football–netball club while works are being done on Mars Stadium. It will then be a lasting legacy for decades to come.

I want to thank the Deputy Premier for joining me to announce this exciting news, and I want to thank Alicia Bond, David Harris and other members of the Committee for Miners Rest for their advocacy over recent years to get this done. I am so proud to be part of a government that listens and delivers the projects that matter.

IDAHOBIT

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (10:05): Recently I met in my Mornington office with Rainbow Connections Mornington Peninsula members, including founder Celeste, Ruth, Kobe, Anne and Monique. They, with me, oppose bullying, hatred, alienation, stigma and/or abuse based on one's sexual orientation or gender identity. I saw and defended against such abuse growing up, and while not being gay myself, like the member for Hastings I copped bullying for being gay because I did not fit the mould.

Kobe asked me to attend IDAHOBIT events in Mornington today, 17 May. Being in Parliament, I was not able to; however, I offered to say some words in Parliament instead. On IDAHOBIT we oppose bullying, hatred and attacks based on one's identity. I personally believe that people should be able to live and let live in a free and democratic society. We must support each other as fellow human beings with equal value. Concurrently, we must avoid misusing or weaponising phobias or isms as ad hominem attacks. We must not silence or cancel people who have differences of opinion on sexuality and gender identity, whether based on their religious or cultural beliefs, world views, academic opinions or otherwise. This weakens such words in defending people genuinely hated, attacked or bullied. We must push for a world that does not treat any human being as 'the other' and that allows for freedom of speech and association to hear each other out, to agree to disagree, to come to compromises and solutions and to love one another. On IDAHOBIT, let us look one another in the eye and treat each other as fellow human beings.

Frankston electorate education

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:07): Happy Education Week, everyone. It was great to see the Minister for Education at the table there before. I was very excited to see her; she is a great minister. I just want to put my appreciation out there for all teachers in Victoria, indeed the nation, but especially in my community of Frankston, a community that I have taught in as a teacher myself. I see so much change happening based on the teaching practices and the culture in those schools, and that might not be just in the education outcomes; often it is in community outcomes with families and the school community as well. It is something that we celebrate in Frankston. We are #TheEducationElectorate – no-one steal that; that is ours. I think our teachers do an amazing job. I am basically a fixture in almost every school in Frankston. I am on a few school councils as well because it is something that truly changes communities, changes states and changes nations.

Power saving bonus

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:08): I would also like to just put on the record that my office has helped over 900 people access the power saving bonus and potentially save more on their power bills. That is a massive \$230,000 into the pockets of people in Frankston to help them keep their lights on and save money on their bills. So I want to say a big thankyou to my team and a big thankyou to everyone who meets us at the Scout halls, the retirement homes and the shopping centres.

Highton Library

Darren CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (10:08): In the heart of my electorate is the iconic Highton Village, and the jewel of the Highton Village is the Highton Library, which has served that community for nearly 50 years since 1977. Sadly, the City of Greater Geelong, for the third time now in the last six years, have attempted to close that library. On two occasions now the community has stood up to defend the Highton Library, a much-loved library serving this community. The third attempt has been orchestrated through massive cuts in the City of Greater Geelong's draft budget, which was handed down only a number of weeks ago. That draft budget is seeing the Geelong Library Corporation receive a \$1 million cut, and the Geelong Library Corporation's response to that circumstance, sadly, is to close three libraries: one in Highton, one in Barwon Heads and one in Geelong West. On this occasion each of those communities are standing up and they are demanding that the City of Greater Geelong restore that funding to those libraries.

Cambodian elections

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:10): Cambodia's main opposition party and the only credible challenge to the country's long-time leader Hun Sen has been barred from contesting Cambodia's July election. Electoral authorities disqualified the Candlelight Party on Monday for not having the correct paperwork. Party officials had warned for weeks that registration was being obstructed by red tape. It should not come as any surprise. As reported by Human Rights Watch, in the past few weeks a number of opposition party members have been assaulted in Phnom Penh while others were convicted on

politically motivated election forgery charges. This is history repeating. In 2018 the Cambodian People's Party won every single seat in the 125-seat National Assembly after the main opposition alliance was dissolved by the politically controlled court and the leader Kem Sokha was sentenced to 27 years in jail. The Candlelight Party formed from that dissolved opposition party and again represented the only credible challenge to Hun Sen. Once again Hun Sen has eliminated any real challenge in yet another election. I call on the Australian Embassy and the Australian government to condemn this action in the strongest possible terms and continue to push for a return to a pluralist democracy, as enshrined in the Cambodian constitution. This is a dark day for Cambodians both in country and here in Australia.

Point Cook football clubs

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:11): I was honoured, and I am sure members would be aware of this already, to present the first Point Cook Community Cup. It is the first time that the division 1 men's football teams, the Sharks and the Bulldogs, have played each other in Point Cook – two great community football clubs. I congratulate Point Cook –

Darren Cheeseman interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: I back everyone who plays for Point Cook. I backed the Point Cook Football Club, which got the four-point victory on the day, as well as the Point Cook Centrals Sporting Club – so the Dogs have got up; the Sharks, though, got off to an absolute flyer in the first quarter. They had risen to division 1 after winning the flag last season. Why am I talking about this? It is because of the dire need for sporting facilities – and quality sporting facilities – in the electorate. We have been very supportive of this. We put over \$1 million towards the Point Cook Football Club's sporting facility, but it is about a third of the way there. So I am calling to see that council and others go and support the footy club as well, because our community deserves the quality sporting facilities of every community across the state. I am so pleased that the minister is here, who has been recently out in Point Cook and is such a huge advocate and deliverer in the electorate of Point Cook. Thank you, Minister.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Integrity and Oversight Committee

The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (10:14): I rise to make a contribution on committee reports, including *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* minority report of October 2022. Integrity issues should always be bipartisan, so the actions of the Labor government in regard to IBAC recently have been underwhelming and disappointing – so much so that the Integrity and Oversight Committee published a minority report, an unprecedented step forced by the Labor majority of the committee trying, it seems, to cover up for the Labor government. My colleagues the member for Sandringham and the member for Rowville did an excellent job on the minority report, which highlights the tendencies of this Andrews Labor government in their influencing of the independent auditor. In the course of the audit the partner at the audit firm said it was 'highly improbable that we will be able to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence' due to restrictions on site visits, departures of key staff and other difficulties accessing relevant information. Ultimately the auditor was unable to express an opinion against the audit objectives.

In October 2022 the former chair of the parliamentary committee, Labor's Dustin Halse, the former member for Ringwood, directly interfered with the auditor by telling them what should be in their report, which calls into question the real independence of the report. At one point the Labor chair of the committee even requested the live feed of a public hearing be cut in a blatant partisan attempt to protect the Labor government. This comes as a former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich KC wrote

to the Presiding Officers of this Parliament with concerns about corruption, including that the Integrity and Oversight Committee had been trying to 'dig up dirt' on IBAC. Indeed Redlich alleged that members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee had leaked to the media 'to gain some political advantage'. Redlich also stated that:

These leaks seem designed to put IBAC in an invidious position as they often relate to confidential operational matters to which IBAC is not able to publicly respond. This ongoing problem has meant that IBAC must be quite selective as to what it can disclose to the IOC.

Incredibly, the Premier simply then dismissed Redlich as 'someone who used to do a job who has written a letter that apparently says a whole bunch of stuff'. That was incredibly dismissive of someone of such eminence and experience who raised many genuine concerns that should have been taken seriously.

There is also the recent IBAC report which found ministerial advisers improperly influenced decisions that should be independently made by public servants. The inquiry concluded that staff pressured health department officials to award a \$1.2 million contract to a union, and I might note that union directly donates to and is intertwined with the Labor Party. Incredibly, the Premier dismissed this report as clearly 'educational'. Ombudsman Deborah Glass did not agree it was merely educational, saying the report was 'damning'. The Ombudsman stated:

I think it says a lot about the Premier's views on corruption and integrity ... It was not an educational report. It was a damning report about misconduct of ministerial advisers and ministerial responsibility for those advisers. Victoria is now a laggard rather than a leader in parliamentary integrity.

Colleagues, do we think the Premier should listen to people like Robert Redlich and Deborah Glass speaking without fear or favour? Yes, he should. What kind of a Premier would not even want to read a letter about corruption occurring in his government, written by an eminent judge and former head of a corruption commission, and what Premier would ignore concerns from a person of the highest integrity, Deborah Glass? The Premier's tendency in this regard with respect to lack of integrity and the centralisation of power in his personal office just shows the contempt that he has for this Parliament and the people of Victoria.

This is why the Integrity and Oversight Committee report is so important, specifically the minority report, which I encourage members opposite to read, along with the Redlich letter and Glass's concerns. The state Labor government, those opposite, should not only read these letters or listen to these concerns, they must take action to reform the Integrity and Oversight Committee, to properly listen to and respond to the concerns of Redlich and Glass, to weed out politicised public service appointments, to improve integrity and to stamp out corruption.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnet) (10:19): It gives me great pleasure this morning to rise and contribute on the various reports that are tabled by the various committees. Committee work in this place –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Which report is the member speaking on?

Dylan WIGHT: Sorry. I am speaking on the *Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022*.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Dylan WIGHT: It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on the *Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022*. I sit on more than one committee. I sit on the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which produced this report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022, and I also have the pleasure of sitting on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which will be undertaking some incredibly important work later this year and holding public hearings into the changing behaviour of Victoria's road users.

With that, I would like to thank everybody that contributes to those committees for the power of work that is done in producing reports of this nature. Obviously I would like to thank the secretariat, the responsible ministers and indeed the members that are involved in these committees. And I would particularly like to thank my Labor colleagues on SARC, the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. It is a committee that is chaired wonderfully, I must say, by a new member in this place, the member for Greenvale Iwan Walters, somebody that has come into this place and has contributed, I think, probably as well as we will ever see a new member in this place contribute. I would also like to thank the member for Broadmeadows Kathleen Matthews-Ward and also two members in the other place, Sonja Terpstra and Sheena Watt. As I said, I am on this committee as well, so I should probably give myself a shout-out too. I think I do pretty good work on this committee, if I do say so myself. It is incredibly appropriate, as I did earlier, to really thank the staff on this committee that bring it all together. Without the help of Ms Helen Mason, who is the executive officer –

A member: Hear, hear!

Dylan WIGHT: Absolutely. She has got a long history on SARC, Helen. She has done fantastic work on that committee now over a number of terms, and she continues to do so for us right now. Without the help of Helen, I can tell you, that particular committee would not get as much done as it does. Also I would like to thank Ms Katie Helme, who is the senior research officer and who also does absolutely amazing work. I can say from experience sometimes she has to answer some of the more inane questions that I have heard in committee work. I also thank Mr Simon Dinsbergs, who is the business support officer and who does absolutely fantastic work; Mr Sonya Caruana, who is the office manager; and also Professor Jeremy Gans, who is able to provide the committee with fantastic insight into human rights law and the human rights charter and make sure that all of the decisions the committee is making are in line with that charter, because that is obviously something that is of the utmost importance to the Andrews Labor government.

This report, which has now been tabled and which people can read, comes with a whole host of recommendations, and I encourage those in the chamber to go through it.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:24): I would like to speak on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* report, which was completed in October 2022, and I understand it is one of the approved reports that we are able to debate in this chamber. I would like to refer to page 4 of the minority report at the rear of this committee report, because it raises some deep concerns around the appointment of the independent auditor of IBAC and some issues within that. As we know, it is very, very important that we do meet all of the legislative requirements to ensure that our government-funded organisations are audited to make sure that all of those legislative requirements are met.

I do note that the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, the IBAC act, specifically requires an appointment of a performance auditor to determine whether this agency ‘is achieving its objectives effectively, economically and efficiently’. Now, with IBAC, they have an enormous amount of work to do. In fact if we look at IBAC and its ability to do its work efficiently, we can look no further than the front page of today’s *Herald Sun*, which would indicate that there is yet another IBAC investigation into the corrupt Andrews Labor government. It is labelled ‘Code red alarm’, and it indicates that this follows an investigation by the Victorian Ombudsman into an issue whereby it appears that there were an increased number of code 1 calls in the lead-up to the election; however, there was no code red called at all. Now, of course when a code red is called it means that the community is told ‘Make your own way to the hospital if you possibly can’ and it takes additional pressure off ambulance services. This is something that is very, very important in supporting our fabulous health workers across the system, particularly when there is incredible demand. We know

there is a massive shortfall in the number of health workers within our hospital system, within our mental health system and within the ambulance system, and when a code red is called it is done for a reason: it is to make sure that the most critically ill people have ambulances quarantined off for them so they can get to hospital quickly and get the treatment that they need.

Now, it is deeply concerning – and this is something the Victorian Ombudsman has been looking at – that what has actually been taking place is that, perhaps, a government call was made: ‘We don’t want any code reds called into the lead-up to the election because it could be bad for us.’ It would have determined that perhaps some of the members here would not have been elected if there had been some front-page news about code reds being called in the ambulance system in the lead-up to the election last year. And so it appears we have got another IBAC investigation that will look very, very deeply into whether that call was actually made by the corrupt Labor government. Now, it is important of course that we make sure that there is –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Point of order, Minister.

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I know that the member is not impugning the reputation of a member of this place, but I do take exception where the member is referring to this government as being corrupt. The other point I would make –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is?

Danny Pearson: The other point I would raise is that the committee report is fairly narrow, it relates to the performance audit which was conducted into IBAC. The member is straying into matters that do not relate to that audit and do not relate to the conduct of that audit, and I would ask that you bring the member back to the report itself rather than talking around it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will rule on the point of order. On the point of order it has been a somewhat wideranging debate, although not completely. The member to continue, there is no point of order.

Emma KEALY: Thank you very much. While it is a very good little grab that we will be able to use for the member of Essendon to be talking about the Labor government being corrupt – it is important, as is outlined in this report, that we have independent audits of IBAC to make sure that it is achieving its objectives effectively, economically and efficiently. I do encourage all of the government ministers who are invited to provide evidence to IBAC through this code red IBAC investigation to recall everything, to make sure they are – *(Time expired)*

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Darren CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (10:29): It is with some pleasure this morning that I rise to make my contribution on committee reports on a report undertaken by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee into the appointment of a person to conduct a financial audit of the Victorian Auditor General's Office. I do so as someone who grew up in the 1990s, who started to form my political beliefs in so many ways in terms of what the Kennett government was doing at that point in time around how this state ran and the functioning of the state of Victoria.

Of course one of the profound attacks undertaken by that government was to erode the responsibilities and the independence of a whole range of different entities, including the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. I, like so many people in that period of time, was appalled by those attacks, because these types of bodies provide independent reporting on the financial obligations of various state governments and

various departments, agencies et cetera. I formed at that point in time a very strong view that the Auditor-General's office needs to have its independence so that it can report in a true way to the Parliament of Victoria the financial health of all of the various entities that it has responsibility for looking into.

With respect to this particular committee report, they looked into the requirements for this independent body itself to be subject to an appropriate audit, and that is of course completely appropriate – that a parliamentary committee on behalf of the Parliament has that carriage to make a recommendation to the Parliament and to the Auditor-General's office about how those audits would be undertaken. And I think that is, whilst not necessarily a particularly sexy part of the work of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – it is certainly not necessarily its highest profile report – certainly an important function: that the Auditor-General's office be subject from time to time to audit to make sure that its house is appropriately in order, that it has got its financial arrangements appropriately accounted for, consistent with accounting standards and other financial instruments that might sit in this place. The reason why that is important is because it is important that the Parliament and the Victorian community have confidence that the Auditor-General's office have their own house in order so that they can go about then making sure that the houses of all of the other parts of government are appropriately financially in order as well.

This is not a long report. I do not imagine that this piece of work took that committee a particularly long period of time to do. It is just one of a number of reports that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee do through the course of the year. It is certainly nowhere near as high profile as some of the other work that they do, but nevertheless in terms of the Parliament maintaining confidence and the Victorian community maintaining confidence in the Auditor-General's office in doing its work, this is important work that they have done.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:34): I rise to speak on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* committee report prepared by the Integrity and Oversight Committee in the 59th Parliament but presented in the 60th Parliament. Integrity in government is essential to being a good government. Sadly, though, the trend that we are seeing of the current government is a trend where today there is another front-page news story around another IBAC investigation. I have genuinely lost count of how many that is. Is it six; is it eight? This complete lack of integrity in Victoria under the Andrews Labor government appears to be the norm and is continually being exposed, including with this committee report, one of many that are quickly accumulating. As I just state again, there is front-page news today just demonstrating my point.

Integrity is of the utmost importance in any democratic society, and the people of Victoria hold their governments to a high standard. Integrity is certainly questioned in the minority report. The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission was established by the Victorian Liberal Party. We are the party that values integrity and transparency. Sadly, the same cannot be said for those opposite, as mounting evidence continues to show.

As Victorian Liberals we established IBAC with the purpose of ensuring accountability and ensuring that corruption within the government and public sector did not prevail. However, recent events that have occurred under the Premier, Daniel Andrews, have raised concerns highlighted by the minority report regarding the independence and integrity of the IBAC review process conducted last year. The Integrity and Oversight Committee was a majority Andrews Labor government committee with a Labor chair, and it was accused of interfering in the review process. Naturally this interference has raised serious questions about the independence of the committee's review process and this

government's disinterest in integrity, which the Andrews Labor government seems to have no respect for. The recommendations made in the minority report suggest strengthening legislation.

The minority report may be what led former Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commissioner Robert Redlich to express his concerns over the independence of the IBAC review process – a highly unprecedented action. He wrote a letter to the Parliament of Victoria emphasising the need for an independent chair and highlighting the interference that had occurred under the Andrews Labor government. This was significant and should not have been ignored, as the Premier disgracefully attempted to do.

As the report indicated, it is disheartening to know that the Premier, despite being subjected to another IBAC investigation – I have lost count, but it is six, maybe eight, IBAC investigations into himself and his government – dismissed the significance of Robert Redlich's recommendations. This dismissal is deeply concerning for the people of Victoria, who value honesty and integrity from their government but are receiving none of this from their Labor Premier, a Premier that 'cannot recall' and considers evidence of soft corruption in his government to be 'educational' rather than the damning indictment it is of his failure as a leader.

Whilst the minority report applied much-needed pressure for reform, it is shameful that it took so long and so much convincing in order for the Premier to action the recommendation and install an independent chair. The situation prior was simply a government having oversight of itself. An independent chair will help ensure a future process free from political interference by Labor, and it should be commended that the Liberal Party and my colleagues put so much pressure on and got that result.

Furthermore, it is essential that the composition of the committee reflects a balanced representation. A committee with an Andrews Labor government majority just raises doubts about its ability to carry out its duties. To uphold the values of integrity and oversight the committee should include members from various political parties. Whilst the committee finally is not composed of majority government numbers, it was disappointing that Labor was so reluctant to adopt Commissioner Redlich's recommendation. They brokered a secret deal with the Greens to stop the commissioner even getting a chance to speak at the committee. If it is not clear enough from the minority report, then I think this government needs to take a good look at itself, and today we see again another IBAC.

Business of the house

Exford Primary School bus crash

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (10:39): (*By leave*) I rise to make a statement about the terrible collision yesterday that involved students from Exford Primary School. Our thoughts remain with the students that are currently in hospital, and of course their families, and the staff who were at the scene of yesterday's collision. Our thoughts are especially with the children that were injured and the families that were affected by this tragedy. We acknowledge the amazing response of Lisa Campo, the principal of Exford Primary School, her leadership team and all of her staff as well as the support provided by Eynesbury Primary School teachers, who were very quickly on the scene and ensured that every child affected by the bus collision was safely attended to until their parents arrived.

Along with the Premier and the member for Melton, I have spoken to the principal. She knows that we are supporting her and her team at the school as they recover today and the broader school community. My department will continue to extend all of the support that they need to students, staff and families, including student support services, on the ground today. Can I also thank emergency services, who were amazing at the scene, and extend my thanks to the Royal Children's Hospital for their assistance.

During this difficult time I just want to emphasise that it is really important that we request that the local community and affected families be given the respect of privacy. I cannot imagine how parents would

be traumatised by this. It is every parent's worst nightmare to get a call like this – that their child has been involved in such a terrible incident. Our thoughts and prayers from this place go out to them.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (10:41): (*By leave*) We join with the Minister for Education in extending our thoughts and prayers to those affected by yesterday's horrific bus accident; that extends obviously to the young children who were involved. We are hearing about quite harrowing circumstances there, so we wish them all the best through this most difficult time, as we do their families and their parents in particular and the first responders and of course the driver, who also sustained injuries. We hope and trust that the driver is recovering. We extend our thoughts and prayers also to the staff, to Principal Campo obviously, to those drivers who stopped and assisted where they could and to all the first responders who rendered aid and assisted in yesterday's terrible accident. It is good that the house can come together to extend these thoughts and concerns to those affected, and we stand with the government in ensuring that whatever aid can be provided is provided.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:42): (*By leave*) I would like to acknowledge from this house the difficult situation that those many schoolchildren are in following the serious school bus crash at Eynesbury yesterday involving Exford Primary School students. I think that for any parent who has got school-aged children – I understand it is grade 3 to grade 6 children who were involved in that bus crash – seeing the images in the media in the past 16 hours or so really has hit all of us very, very hard. I understand that 13 kids and the driver as well have been taken to hospital, 10 suffering from serious injuries and one who is still in intensive care. Of course we send all our care and good wishes to their families for a recovery.

I would also like to thank all of the first responders on the scene: the SES, the police, the fire service and all of the people that stopped. There were tens of vehicles of Victorians who wanted to help out. They were helping to take the children out of the bus. They really stood up when those kids needed it the most, and I do thank them for their work. We also thank the fantastic health workers at the Royal Children's Hospital. I understand that one child has had a full amputation. There are many other children who have had partial amputations. There are some that will certainly take a long time to recover from this. It is good to hear that the government is providing support to the local school, but we certainly need to see this happen in the long term. It is not just the physical injuries that are going to make an impact on these children, but also this is a very traumatic event. So I do urge the government to ensure that all of the long-term support is provided, including mental health support, for the students involved in the accident but also for the other students at school and the wider family and the educators at the school to make sure that they can have a rapid recovery. We know that it will be a very, very long road to recovery. I know, on behalf of the Nationals and the coalition, we absolutely are giving our full support to everybody involved in that accident. I hope that we can see everybody back at school as soon as possible.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:45): (*By leave*) I am sure that the house would agree that any tragic incident that occurs is one that we all feel profoundly and touches us all. There are incidents, though, that touch us deeply, and I would say that this is one of those occasions – when people from across this state have been so incredibly moved, concerned and worried for those involved in this incident that occurred yesterday. To hear the CEO of the hospital caring for these children and the passers-by who stopped their cars to get out and help these kids I think has touched people across this state. I know that the kids involved in this crash have been in everybody's hearts ever since the incident. The incident has clearly been so tragic in nature, and the harm and damage to these kids has been just so moving. I am sure that I speak for every Victorian and every person in this place when I say that we have been so incredibly moved. Today our hearts will be with everybody involved – I want to place that on record, on behalf of this whole chamber – with the families and children, for their absolute best and speediest recovery.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (10:47): (*By leave*) I just want to make a brief comment, if I may. I think as parents we all at different times get the emails coming through from Compass saying ‘Your child is invited to go on an excursion’ and invariably we see that email and just say ‘Yep, that’s fine, no issues’. The night before you will talk to your children and they will tell you about what they are going to do the next day. You always expect that you will have a conversation around the dinner table that night – that they will come home, that they will have had a rich and rewarding experience and they will have learned. So when you have something like what happened yesterday, as a parent you just cannot imagine the grief and the trauma that would ripple through this community, through these families and these children.

The fear those children must have gone through when they realised that they were involved in a major collision – the time between impact and the time when help arrived, even if it was minutes, must have felt like hours. For young children, being exposed like this to that level of trauma and grief would be unimaginable – and for the families receiving that call. Just imagine: you are at work or you are at home and going about your normal daily affairs and you get the call late in the afternoon when you think that they are going to be coming home, or you are at the school waiting to pick them up and you get the call and you hear this news, being away from your child and not knowing what has happened to them, what the impact has been, whether they will be okay or not and if they have been injured, how serious it is.

This is an incredibly traumatic experience. I think it is really important that we as a Parliament have come together to express our remorse and sorrow for this. There is an opportunity to make sure that we provide all the necessary supports to the school and the families. We know that trauma – it can be a moment, it can be instantaneous, but particularly for a child – can last a lifetime. I know that this community is going to need a lot of support and care over the journey going forward to get through the physical injuries which are profound and manifest but to also ensure, going forward, there is that support provided to them. Again, it is important that as a Parliament we come together to acknowledge this. Our thoughts are with the school and the community at this very challenging and difficult time.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:49): (*By leave*) I rise to make some comments about the tragic bus accident that happened yesterday. I also support what the previous member said on thinking about those children that do travel to and from school each and every day. I was one of them. You just expect that your kids are going to arrive home safely – but to think that 45 children were tragically injured and think about what they are going through and what their families are going through, to think of the trauma that the school will have to deal with, and to think of those first responders that were on the scene dealing with this, as they do each and every day. Our thoughts are with them.

It is a tragedy that we are seeing these incidents happening on our roads. Within the last 24 hours we have also seen two fatalities in my electorate of Caulfield – two deaths – from a BMW speeding. Again, from talking to a first responder who was first on the scene there, I note what the impact is for him and what the repercussions are in terms of what they have to deal with each and every day. I know that our immediate focus should be on everything we can do to ensure that the families get all the support they need and that the kids get absolutely the best health care that they can possibly have, but beyond this we have got to look together as a Parliament at what we can do to ensure road safety is a priority and we do not see these kinds of accidents happen again.

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (10:51): (*By leave*) I too want to extend my sincere thoughts in relation to the absolutely shocking events that unfolded yesterday in the west. Of course my thoughts are with the kids and all the families, the teachers and the entire Exford Primary School community. As a western suburbs MP, it really struck me when I heard the news yesterday, and driving in today and seeing the front of the Royal Children’s Hospital really made my heart sink. I know many families and parents are all praying and sending their thoughts to the families and in particular the children that are at the hospital receiving the best treatment at this point.

I also want to extend my thanks to the incredible first responders for their diligent work. There must have been some really horrific scenes, but they all united and worked very hard to make sure that the children were safe and were able to be transported in a speedy way to receive the care that they needed. I also want to thank Sunshine Hospital. They were also part of yesterday's emergency in treating the children. Again, our hearts and prayers go out to the families, the children and the school community at this point. We are here to support them through this process. It will be of course a long process for some of the children, but we are all thinking of the school community and in particular the children and families.

Notices of motion

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10:53): I wish to advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 1 today and ask that it remain on the notice paper. Further, I move:

That the consideration of government business, notice of motion 2, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 3 today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

Bills

Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:55): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the **Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023**.

In my opinion, the **Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023**, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The Bill makes amendments to the *Electricity Industry Act 2000*, the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* and the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*. These amendments will introduce reforms in the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* to mitigate against the significant adverse impact of an electricity outage emergency, clarify how fees are set under the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment Act 2022*, which was enacted in August 2022 but has not yet commenced operation, and amend the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* to clarify the powers of the Essential Services Commission under the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007*.

Part 2 of the Bill will introduce reforms directed towards mitigating the harm of electricity outage emergencies, by:

- enabling the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to direct distribution companies to support people impacted by an electricity outage emergency. This support may include, but is not limited to, the giving of specified information to DEECA, or requiring a distribution company to support relief activities and programs;
- providing a process for and requirements relating to, the giving of a direction, including matters that the Secretary must consider before giving a direction;
- providing that distribution companies must comply with a direction, and that failure to do so can incur a civil penalty.

Human Rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are –

- right to privacy and reputation (section 13).

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified having regard to the factors in section 7(2) of the Charter.

Privacy and reputation

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

Provision of affected customer supply information, relevant customer information for payment schemes and prescribed information

In Part 2 of the Bill, new section 109E(1) provides that the Department Head of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (that is, the Secretary) may give a direction (emergency direction) to require a distribution company to do things specified in the emergency direction where the Department Head is satisfied that an electricity outage emergency is occurring, or has occurred within the previous two months. To issue an emergency direction, the Department Head also needs to be of the opinion that giving the direction to the distribution company is reasonably necessary to mitigate against the significant adverse impact of the electricity outage emergency on affected customers of the distribution company.

Section 109E(2)(a) outlines that the Department Head may, in an emergency direction, require a distribution company to provide information to the Department Head that is specified in the direction. This information may include ‘affected customer supply information’. ‘Affected customer supply information’ is defined in new section 109D to mean information relating to the supply of electricity at the premises of an affected customer. This is defined to include:

- the addresses of the premises at which an affected customers is supplied electricity;
- information as to whether electricity is being supplied to the meter at the premises of an affected customer; and
- information as to whether an affected customer is a life support customer.

‘Affected customer’ will be defined in new section 109D to mean a deemed customer of the distribution company who is or has been affected by a disruption to the distribution or supply of electricity. ‘Deemed customers’ of a distribution company are retail customers who are deemed to have entered into a contract with the distribution company under section 40A of the *Electricity Industry Act 2000*.

New section 109E(2)(c) also provides that the Department Head may require a distribution company to provide specified relevant customer information to DEECA to support the administration of a payment scheme. Under the Bill, distribution companies may be asked to assist with the processing of applications and making payments under payment schemes that may be accessed by affected customers in an electricity outage emergency. Relevant customer information may include the names and addresses of affected customers, the number of occupants of premises of affected customers, information as to whether electricity is being supplied to the meter at the premises, and other prescribed information relating to affected customers held by the distribution company.

Information that may be required to be provided to the Department Head under an emergency direction issued in reliance on section 109E(2)(a) and 109E(2)(c) may, therefore, include personal information of affected customers.

Section 109L of the Bill will also enable the Department Head to share such information with public sector entities where the Department Head is of the opinion that it is reasonably necessary to enable the recipient to perform functions to mitigate against the significant adverse impact of an electricity outage emergency.

To the extent that the information empowered to be collected under emergency directions and shared with public sector entities for the purposes of mitigating against the significant adverse impact of an electricity outage emergency includes personal information, the Bill will engage the right to privacy.

Any limit on the right to privacy by Part 2 of the Bill is reasonable and justified

Although these provisions permit the Department Head and public sector agencies to deal with personal and identifying information, I do not consider these dealings are unlawful or arbitrary.

The circumstances in which information can be collected is limited to the purposes for which the power is granted. The Department Head may only require provision of such information in a direction if the Department Head is of the opinion that its provision is reasonably necessary to mitigate against the significant adverse impact of the electricity outage emergency on affected customers of the distribution company.

Similarly, disclosure of any information (including personal information) is limited to where Department Head is of the opinion that it is reasonably necessary to enable the recipient to perform functions to mitigate against the significant adverse impact of an electricity outage emergency. Under new section 109L the Department Head may only disclose the information collected under new Part 6AB to public sector entities. Information will be disclosed to these entities to enable them to perform their functions during emergency response operations. The information will not be published or available to the community at large.

The collection of information pursuant to directions under section 109E, and any disclosure of information collected via those directions, are measures only able to be drawn upon in the context of an electricity outage emergency to assist the emergency management response and the planning and management of relief and recovery activities. This is so that they can assist in the mitigation of the adverse impacts of an electricity outage emergency on the customers whose information is collected.

Further, DEECA and each relevant agency that is a public entity or public service body within the meaning of the *Public Administration Act 2004* are bound by the requirements of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and must ensure that any collection, use or disclosure of information is undertaken in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles set out in Part 3 of that Act.

In addition, information collected under section 109E(2)(c) is to enable DEECA to review this information to assist in confirming whether an affected customer is eligible for a payment scheme for which they have voluntarily applied.

Accordingly, in my view, these provisions will not be an arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, as any collection and disclosure of personal information authorised by these amendments will only occur to the extent considered necessary to mitigate against the significant adverse impacts of an electricity outage emergency.

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy and Resources

Second reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:56): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill has two important purposes. The first purpose is to amend the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* to enable electricity distribution businesses to be directed to provide government with information and assist in relief efforts following energy emergencies and associated prolonged power outages. Electricity distribution businesses hold key information and resources to assist in emergency response and recovery. While we as a community expect them to voluntarily provide this information and resources, there may be instances where they need to be required to do so.

In recent years we have seen the disruption and devastating impacts that storms and associated power outages have on affected Victorians. Unfortunately, the severe weather events that result in these outages are likely to increase in frequency as a result of climate change. The increased likelihood of severe storms and resulting power outages makes progressing this reform a critical priority.

The second purpose of the Bill is to amend both the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* and the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* to strengthen compliance with the Victorian Energy Upgrades program, which delivers cost savings on energy for Victorian consumers and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

June and October 2021 storms

In June and October 2021, severe storms caused widespread and prolonged power outages across Victoria. Following the June storms, 68,000 customers were without power after 72 hours and 9,000 customers were still without power seven days after the event. Additionally, following the October storms, nearly 24,000 customers remained off supply 72 hours after and just over 2,500 customers were still without power seven days after the event. In both instances, the power outages were more prolonged compared with previous storm events.

The experience of these storms highlighted the limits to getting critical information from electricity distribution businesses to support relief activities and programs for customers. A subsequent external review was undertaken to identify priority reform measures and policies to enable distribution businesses to mitigate the risk of, and better respond to, prolonged power outages in the future.

Review of Victorian electricity distribution businesses' network resilience obligations

In August 2021, the Victorian Government commissioned the Electricity Distribution Network Resilience Review in response to the devastating storms of June 2021. An Expert Panel was appointed to investigate how distribution businesses can improve their preparedness for, and response to, prolonged power outages caused by storms and other extreme weather events.

The Expert Panel found that the participation of distribution businesses in emergency response and recovery was not delivering positive outcomes for impacted customers. Victorian customers were provided with mixed messaging on power restoration times, insufficient relief measures, and were disregarded during emergency operations. We know there will be more extreme weather events due to the effects of climate change, and so our Government is committed to finding a range of solutions to prepare and protect consumers in energy emergency situations.

Creation of directions power

The Bill amends the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* to provide the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with a new power to direct distribution businesses where there is an emergency power outage. First, a direction may compel electricity distribution businesses to provide information to the Secretary to assist in emergency management operations. Second, a direction may compel electricity distribution businesses to support and administer relief programs and payments to their impacted customers during and following a prolonged power outage. Failure to comply with a direction could attract a civil penalty of more than \$200,000, reflecting how serious the impacts of non-compliance can be for affected customers.

Recognising that the core role of distribution businesses during and after a prolonged power outage emergency includes the restoration of power, the Bill provides that the directions power can only be exercised if the Secretary considers it reasonably necessary to mitigate against the significant adverse impacts of an electricity outage. The direction can also only be given if the Secretary is satisfied that an electricity outage emergency is occurring, or has occurred within two months prior to the direction being given.

Other reforms relating to the Victorian Energy Upgrades program

The Bill will amend the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* to allow for the Minister to directly set fees for the Victorian Energy Upgrades program instead of having these fees prescribed through regulations.

The Bill will further amend the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* to clarify that the Essential Services Commission has powers to apply civil penalties in relation to the Victorian Energy Upgrades program.

These amendments to the Victorian Energy Upgrades program will further strengthen the program's delivery of cost-saving outcomes to Victorian customers and align the program's effectiveness in lowering greenhouse gas emissions from continued use of legacy equipment in Victorian households and businesses.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:56): I move:

That this debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the debate be adjourned for six days.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:56): The minister has just moved that a bill be adjourned for six days. This is absolutely outrageous. In the last sitting week we saw the government ram through a bill without proper consultation with the community. Today we have just received a bill, a substantive bill – it is hot off the press; it is still hot after being photocopied – and the minister is seeking to adjourn it for six days. The shame of this government – I am sure that no Victorian thought that the government could do worse than seeking to adjourn a bill for less than 14 days or 13 days. This is now a standard breach –

A member: So arrogant.

James NEWBURY: a standard arrogant breach of the Westminster tradition, a breach that is now happening bill after bill. Bill after bill is being adjourned and rammed through as quickly as possible, partly because the government has not got a legislative program. We know that to be a fact. We know that they do not have the bills being drafted, considered and put through this place in a meaningful way. They do not have the work being done. Ministers are getting lazy, ministers are getting arrogant and ministers are not doing the work they need to do to ensure that the Parliament's time is being used appropriately. So now we see a bill being put to this place still hot because no-one has had the time to see it. It has just come off the photocopier and is being moved in this place, and the minister has sought to adjourn it for six days. I have not seen this done, certainly in this place; I have not seen it being done since, frankly, the worst days with some of the bills being pushed through the federal Parliament. I am not casting aspersions on only one particular party in that matter. I am saying I have seen this happen in the federal Parliament on both sides, by both parties. It was, I think, some of the worst behaviour of sitting governments in the federal Parliament – the worst behaviour – and it was identified as bad practice. It was identified as a breach of a 100-year tradition to allow the community time to consider these bills.

Why wouldn't you want the community to look at what you are proposing to do? That is the question. Why would you not want the community to consider what is being proposed in this place? A government should want the community involved in what they are considering doing. Yet this government does not want the community to be part of this discussion. It is outrageous, and it is now the standard practice. It is now the standard practice to ram through bills and not allow the community to consider them.

We know that with the state budget coming up it will be difficult for the community to have the time to consider bills. It will have difficulty. I cannot see any way in which the government and the speakers who respond after me can possibly get up and say that it is fair and reasonable to breach a 100-year tradition of our Westminster parliaments – a 100-year tradition. How could you possibly stand up and say that that is okay when it is not? Again I make the point: this behaviour is something that I have only seen in the worst way in the federal Parliament from, frankly, both sides of the chamber, and it was recognised as such. It was recognised as being a breach and a disrespect to the community.

Lily D'Ambrosio: Do you know what the bill is about?

James NEWBURY: The minister asks if I know what the bill is about – having just received a copy. It is still hot after coming off the photocopier. Of course I do not and neither does the community, and that is why we are standing up to make this point, because we cannot have an opportunity to understand these bills. We cannot have an opportunity because the government is trying to ram it through. It is a disgrace, and it should be seen for what it is.

Darren CHEESEMEN (South Barwon) (11:01): I have just seen a whole lot of mock outrage by the member for Brighton. The absolute reality is that at every single opportunity when the Andrews Labor government seeks to reform Victoria's electricity system, they get in the way, and the reason why they get in the way at every single opportunity is because they continue to defend their privatisation agenda of the 1990s. That is the reality – at every single opportunity.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate about the government ramming through a bill, not an opportunity to sledge the opposition. I would ask you to counsel the member and ask the member to come back to that tight procedural debate about ramming a bill through this place.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for South-West Coast, you are not in your place. Member for South Barwon, this is a tight procedural debate, and I ask you to come back to the motion.

Darren CHEESEMAN: The Andrews Labor government continues to do the important work of reforming Victoria's electricity generation system.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, as you just ruled, this is a tight procedural debate. It is not a debate on the substance of the bill; this is a debate about whether or not it is appropriate to ram through a bill in six days. That is what this debate is about.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business is correct; however, I allowed the Manager of Opposition Business some leeway in his contribution, and I will do the same for the member for South Barwon. But I do remind members that this is a procedural debate.

Darren CHEESEMAN: I was making the point that at every single opportunity when the Andrews Labor government brings legislation into this place Liberal Party members get up on their feet and seek –

James Newbury: On a different point of order, Speaker, the member has just spoken to a matter quite extraneous to the procedural debate, and I would ask you to draw him back to the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for South Barwon, it is a tight procedural debate.

Darren CHEESEMAN: Thank you. The point I am trying to make is that the Andrews Labor government has a massive reform agenda. This bill is a critical element to our reform program that we proudly took to the Victorian election. We will continue to reform –

James Newbury: Speaker –

The SPEAKER: Order! Manager of Opposition Business, if this is the same point of order, I will call if I hear him being out of order.

Darren CHEESEMAN: This is an important bill for the people of Victoria. It is important for those communities that have endured electricity outages. We have got a massive reform agenda. We are bringing this bill to this Parliament early in this term –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance. My understanding is that this is purely about the period of time that is supposed to be given for the legislation to be in the house so we can consult with our community. I am unsure as to the relevance of the reform agenda of this government to that procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on this point of order a number of times. I do ask the member for South Barwon to come back to the matter before the house; however, I will allow some deviation, as I did with the Manager of Opposition Business.

Darren CHEESEMAN: As I said, this is an important reform. We have brought this to this Parliament. We have been actively consulting communities across Victoria. The opposition have been caught sleeping at the wheel again, and of course they only ever come to this place –

James Newbury: On a different point of order, Speaker, in terms of decorum of the house and your capacity to keep order in this house, sledging the opposition is not appropriate debate.

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

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (11:06): This is again showing the complete contempt for the forms of the house that this government – this arrogant government – that is into its third term and has run out of ideas –

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Speaker, given the points of order that have just been raised about the narrowness of the debate, for the member for Gippsland South to jump up and jump straight into an attack broadly on the government, I think he should be ruled out of order. If I dare suggest, Speaker, he needs to be brought back to the debate before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: On the point of order, Speaker, I started with saying this is contempt for the house and the processes. I am talking specifically about the motion before us.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have heard the point of order. I remind members again this is a narrow procedural debate. I would ask both sides of the house to cease from 'sledging' each other, as the Manager of Opposition Business has called it, and refer to the very narrow debate before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: The point that we are objecting to is the process that the government is going through to introduce legislation to this chamber. I challenge anyone who follows me on that side, because the member for South Barwon failed, to explain to the house why this legislation needs to be dealt with in six days time. I challenge them to have just one get up and explain. Do not tell us, as the member for South Barwon did, how important this legislation is and what the government's agenda is. Just give us one member of the government who can say why this legislation must be dealt with in six days. On the very issue, whilst the previous two speakers were on their feet, I had a very quick look at this legislation, and it is as I expected –

Darren Cheeseman: On a point of order, Speaker, he is wandering off onto the legislation. That is inconsistent with your rulings.

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland South to come back to the matter before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am curious to understand why we do not need the full two weeks of discussion and consultation for this legislation. This legislation relates to the storms and the power outages that we had after the June 2021 and October 2021 storms.

A member: It was a while ago.

Danny O'BRIEN: It was a while ago. So why the rush? It is two years, nearly, since those storms. I personally had people in my communities that were without power for two weeks, and I have been writing –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gippsland South is anticipating debate on the bill. I ask him to come back to the procedural motion before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: The procedural motion is about how long this Parliament gets to debate this legislation. We do not know what this legislation entails. The context that the minister has given us so far, in the couple of minutes we have had, indicates that this is really important legislation for my electorate. I had people who were without power for two weeks, which is different to what the minister's second-reading speech indicates. The point I am trying to get to is that –

Lily D'Ambrosio: You've read it then. You know what it's about.

Danny O'BRIEN: I have had 20 seconds, Minister, to read it. Once again –

Lily D'Ambrosio interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN: Where was I? I was writing to the minister time and time again about these issues, and I got nothing from the minister. And I hear from the member for South Barwon that there has been extensive consultation. The department had consultation in Traralgon, which was not even affected like South Gippsland was, and six people turned up. And you are saying now that six days is enough for us all to consider this legislation. This is a government that has run out of ideas. They have run out of ideas. They have got nothing for their budget day.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Gippsland will come back to the procedural motion before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: They have run out of ideas. That is why they are desperately trying to bring this forward, as we discussed yesterday in the procedural motion on the government business program. 'We've got no legislation, so we've got to put up a couple of motions.' In eight years prior to this the government had never put up a motion for debate in the government business program, but they have got nothing left. So it is the Victorian people that suffer, because if this is the sort of legislation that I anticipate it is from what the minister has given us so far, we need to actually consult properly.

I know the member for Sandringham will tell members that we were mocked in the previous discussion on this two weeks ago with, 'You've got to get your act together.' We are still getting feedback from stakeholders on the gambling bill this week, because they have not had enough time to look at it. The same applies here. This is a government so out of ideas and so out of direction it is filling gaps, and it is costing the people of Victoria adequate consultation.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (11:11): Goodness me, that was a fair effort, wasn't it. I reckon the member for South Gippsland needed to speak a little louder, because none of us could hear him. Isn't it extraordinary when you say on procedural motions 'The government has run out of ideas', but the government is then bringing bills in that have ideas that you know about and you are complaining that you do not know about them? That is a great way to tie yourself in all kinds of knots, and –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am having trouble hearing the member for Mordialloc.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I note you were unable to hear what was occurring. This is a tight debate, not an observation time, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the motion at hand.

Colin Brooks: On the point of order, Speaker, the member was simply referring to issues in debate that were raised by those opposite. He is entitled to do that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I was unable to hear the member for Mordialloc. I would ask the house to come to order so I can hear the member for Mordialloc. There is no point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: I am happy to reiterate some of the views of the member for South Gippsland, which were not ruled out of order: the government has run out of ideas but then is bringing ideas through to the Parliament. The importance of this bill and its time frame is that it has, as the member for South Gippsland alluded to, gone through an extensive consultation journey, whether it is through Traralgon or other journeys, to this point. And so in context, no bill in that space is equal in that sense. Some will have other journeys. We have seen 13 days, 14 days and the six-day limit that has been put through here.

James Newbury interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Brighton can interject and say 'Oh, well, it's nice, the journey', but this is serious work, the legislation that has been put forward. It is not then –

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Manager of Opposition Business, you had your turn.

Tim RICHARDSON: It is all right. You have had your go. It is okay. I am sure you are speaking on the matter of public importance and you can have a bit of camera time later on. It is our contribution time. But I think we just put forward the point that this has gone through a significant journey – its process here, the consultation that underpins the bill and how it comes through as well. The bill will have its journey through this place and the other, and there will be multiple inputs from a range of different members of Parliament in their contributions on bills. I note the point around consultation, a bill's journey and the time that it gets introduced. But at the moment in *Hansard* we see 13 contributions in the month

of May from Liberals – six, sorry. Six contributions, and the member for Eildon has done half of them – literally half of them. So when you talk about consultation and that journey –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to bring the member back to the narrow procedural debate. He has got the opportunity to tell us why six days is required.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Mordialloc, this is a procedural debate, and I ask you to come back to that.

Tim RICHARDSON: Six days on the urgency of this bill and its consultation journey speaks for itself. It has been a significant journey to this point in its engagement: a panel process that has been put together that has had an 18-month journey from the impact on those communities and the storm-affected communities through to here as well. What would discernibly change from that massive consultation and engagement journey in the six days that we talk about the bill here? What materially will change?

As the member for Gippsland South has eloquently put forward, his awareness, and that of his community, has been long running on this bill, the process to get to this point and its engagement. It was not a surprise, because the member for Gippsland South was able to speak in great detail on the substance of the bill. He was aware of those issues and he was aware of the panel. He showed that after 30 seconds. He does read a lot for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, but he had a lot more knowledge than a 30-second read. That shows that the ability to engage on this in six days is sufficient for this bill.

As I said before, the bill will have a significant journey from this place to the other place, and it might take on different iterations. We will see how that goes. There are shadows in this chamber as well as in the Legislative Council to get it underway. The notion that this actual bill is just six days and there has been no journey to this point is disingenuous, particularly when members have shared with this chamber that they have been on this journey. We look forward to the debate and the six-day engagement and how this gets underway.

A member interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Mate, stick to *Postcards*. Seriously. The journey that this has taken, and how it has gone through, has been really significant. It has been 18 months through that time. What will discernibly change? I am of the view 'nothing', because no-one on that side is doing any consultation and engagement on behalf of their community – no second-reading speeches at all.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a tight debate, not an opportunity to sledge, which the member is now doing.

The SPEAKER: The member's time has expired.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:16): As I look around the chamber, I figure that I have been in this position a lot longer than most others here; there are still a few that have been here for longer than me. Today we are faced with quite an extraordinary situation. We are debating the period of adjournment of debate on bills. Typically this period of adjournment is 14 days. In the last five years I have sat in this chamber at this time when bills are introduced. Far and above most bills are given 14 days. Those 14 days allow us the period of time that we need to go to the stakeholders and to get their feedback so that the stakeholders can come back and tell us what their position is on the bill – whether they like it or whether they do not like it. The reason we have to consult with them is because the government consultation is often telling, not listening, and there is a very big difference. When we go out and talk to the stakeholders, they need to take their time to have a look at the bill and to understand what it means for them and its implications for them. Very often we find that they cannot come back in that 14-day period if there is a lot that they need to look at and consider.

We know that this bill is very hot off the press. It was warm when we picked it up not so long ago – only 20 minutes ago when this first arose. As I said, I have been standing in this position in this time slot for probably the last five years. We have had issues that have required a shorter period of adjournment. There have been some immediate issues that have needed to be dealt with, and those bills are second read and third read very quickly and moved through the chamber. In those instances we have had absolute consultation with the government. We have been advised and we have worked with the government to allow that very smooth and quick transition where that has been the case.

There have been periods where the government has said that they are only going to give 13 days. That is just one day less. When in the last sitting of Parliament we had 13 days we were advised in advance. The government had the good grace to speak to the Leader of the Opposition to let us know that they would be requesting to adjourn the debate on the bill for 13 days. I think it was Minister Horne on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, which we did yesterday. Minister Horne had the good grace to engage with us and let us know that that was going to be 13 days. But today I was absolutely gobsmacked when the minister said six days. I had to stop, I had to look and I had to think, because that was far less than what I would have expected. I would have expected that with the budget coming on they would have a fairly strong agenda. They have got a couple of notices they are prosecuting at the moment that they could easily run into the Tuesday of next week rather than have to ram this bill through.

On the issues that the bill deals with, just from having a very scant look at the second-reading speech and the bill while I have been sitting here, it refers to the storms in June and October 2021. There have been some huge issues and some very slow clean-ups, and I know that Yarra Ranges have been really left high and dry –

Lily D'Ambrosio: On a point of order, Speaker, this is way outside a procedural motion.

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Lily D'Ambrosio: It is. You are going into the substance of the bill, and it is not appropriate.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eildon was anticipating debate on the bill. I ask her to come back to the procedural motion.

Cindy McLEISH: The issue we have before us is that there is no pressing reason why this bill should be treated exceptionally differently from other bills. We know when it has an urgency about it that we are consulted and that things do get second and third read and moved through the chambers very quickly in those matters of urgency and importance. We understand that. But when they are trying to crib a day from 14 to 13 days, that gets us pretty hot under the collar because we do not get that time to do stakeholder consultation. But now there is no pressing reason – there is no burning platform – that this has to be done in six days. The period of adjournment should not be six days. We need time to consult. They are making some changes where they are directing businesses, and I think where businesses are being directed they do need time to consider what that may mean and to feed us that –
(Time expired)

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, during the member for Mordialloc's contribution there was a little instance of drive-by heckling from the member for Nepean, and I would ask that he be counselled to refrain from shouting at people when he is walking through the chamber and on his feet.

The SPEAKER: Order! I did not hear any contribution from the member for Nepean as he was leaving the chamber. I therefore cannot rule on that matter. The member for Melbourne, by leave? Leave is not granted. The house will divide on the question that the debate be adjourned for six days.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carabines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke,

Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Debate adjourned until Tuesday 23 May.

Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (11:30): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The Bill makes amendments to the **Electricity Safety Act 1998**, **Gas Safety Act 1997** and **Pipelines Act 2005** that will improve community safety through more effective and targeted regulation of new and emerging energy safety risks, including those posed by emerging technologies. The Bill will do this by –

- extending the mandatory requirements under the **Electricity Safety Act 1998** for major electricity companies to prepare an electricity safety management scheme and bushfire management plan to declared owners and operators of specified electrical installations. These amendments will mean that those businesses identified as posing a greater safety risk to surrounding lands from the operation of their electrical installations will be required to demonstrate a clear plan for mitigating those safety risks. These businesses will also be subject to certain safety duties and obligations commensurate with a major electricity company under the **Electricity Safety Act 1998**;
- minor technical amendments to ensure the administration of safety management plans by the relevant entity to ensure they remain current to technological changes in electrical installations or the supply of gas;
- align the existing general duties under the **Electricity Safety Act 1998** for companies with complex electrical installations with those existing general duties for companies with electricity supply networks;
- require an electricity supplier to preserve the site of a serious electrical incident and a gas company to preserve the site of a gas incident, for inspection by an enforcement officer or authorised inspector;
- extend the period Energy Safe Victoria can hold onto seized things from an affected company (*person*);
- provide Energy Safe Victoria and the Minister for Energy and Resources with the power to enter into enforceable undertakings with regulated entities as an optional tool from bringing court proceedings; and
- increasing maximum penalties for offences by energy entities relating to maintaining safe networks.

Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill

Section 20 – Property rights

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of that person's property other than in accordance with the law.

Preservation of site of serious incident

Division 2 of Part 12 of the **Electricity Safety Act 1998** requires an electricity supplier to report to Energy Safe Victoria, in accordance with the regulations made under that Act, any serious electrical incident which occurs in relation to the supplier's supply network or any for which it becomes aware, where the incident occurs in relation to an electricity installation that supplies electricity. Similarly, section 36 of the **Gas Safety Act 1997** requires a gas company to report to Energy Safe Victoria, in accordance with regulations under that Act, any gas incident which occurs in relation to a facility to that gas company or any incident for which it becomes aware, where it occurs in relation to a gas installation to which it supplies or sells gas.

Once reported, the electricity supplier or gas company has an obligation to investigate an incident. To ensure the preservation of the incident site until this investigation is complete, clause 39 (new section 142A of the **Electricity Safety Act 1998**) and clause 44 (new section 36A of the **Gas Safety Act 1997**) of the Bill prohibits an electricity supplier or gas company respectively from, without reasonable excuse, disturbing the incident site until otherwise notified by the authorised officer.

To protect the health or safety of any person in the vicinity of the incident site, the Bill also provides an exemption allowing the incident site to be disturbed for the purpose of aiding an injured person or taking action necessary to make the site safe or prevent a further incident. The primary obligations set out in these new provisions regulate the actions of an electrical supplier or gas company and do not directly engage rights set out in the Charter. However, a safety incident may occur on private property thereby affecting a person's property right to attend to their land. The intent of the prohibition from disturbing the site where an incident has occurred provides for an investigation to be undertaken and mitigates the potential of further threats to the safety and well-being of the property owner, safety personnel attending the site or others in the surrounding area.

Insofar as these provisions restrict a person's free access to their property, they do impact on property rights under the Charter. However, this restriction on individual property rights is balanced by the public health and safety considerations conferred by this Bill which justify the limitation to the right to property in these circumstances.

Retention of seized property

Division 2 of Part 11 of the **Electricity Safety Act 1998** set out the powers of entry of authorised officers to the extent that it is necessary to do so for the purpose of investigating a serious electrical incident, determining compliance with an electricity safety management scheme or determining compliance with the Act or regulations made under that Act. Similarly, Division 2 of Part 5 of the **Gas Safety Act 1997** set out the powers of entry of authorised officers, to the extent that it is reasonably necessary to do so, for the purpose of investigating a gas incident, determining compliance with a safety case, monitoring the safety of gas installations and determining compliance with this safety Act or the regulations under that Act.

An enforcement officer (under the Electricity Safety Act) or inspector (under the Gas Safety Act) may, amongst other things, seize anything on the land or premises the enforcement officer or inspector believes on reasonable grounds that is necessary to be seized in order to prevent its concealment, loss or destruction. If a thing is seized by an enforcement officer or inspector, the enforcement officer or inspector must take reasonable steps to return the thing to the person from whom it was seized if the reason for its seizure no longer exists. If the thing has not been returned within 14 days after it is seized the enforcement officer or inspector must take reasonable steps to return it unless proceedings have commenced and those proceedings (including any appeal) have not been completed or a court makes an order extending the period of 14 days.

Clause 34 and 56 of the Bill extends the period of 14 days in both the **Electricity Safety Act 1998** and **Gas Safety Act 1997** to 60 days. This is because the current 14-day period has been found to be insufficient to carry-out fully the necessary technical examination(s) of part or the whole of the effected electricity or gas installation where a serious safety incident has occurred. The extension to the statutory retention period will ensure that adequate time is provided without the need to continually apply to the court to obtain an extension Order (available under both Acts).

For the most part, things seized will be the property of an electricity or gas entity for which the Charter does not apply. However, there is still scope that a thing or things (personal property) may be seized from a property owner on whose property the electrical or gas incident occurred. The seizure of any personal property, lawful under both Acts, would be to determine the cause and effect of a safety incident, thereby potentially mitigating any further damage caused by the incident. On this basis, the public health and safety benefits arising from this Bill justify any potential restriction of property rights under the Charter.

Given the importance served by the new provisions in the Bill to the safety, wellbeing and protection of life and property, it is my view that any potential limitation on the right to property is lawful and non-arbitrary and compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter.

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy and Resources

Second reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (11:30): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The provision of an essential service like energy cannot occur without appropriate regard to safety frameworks. Safety is central to the proper delivery of energy and is crucial to safeguarding consumer protection and confidence.

The Bill is a key part of the Government's broader package of reforms aimed at making Victoria's energy systems more sustainable and accountable to delivering consumer-focused outcomes.

The Bill will amend the *Electricity Safety Act 1998*, the *Gas Safety Act 1997*, and the *Pipelines Act 2005*, to strengthen the energy safety compliance framework.

Increase in new energy technologies and need for safety framework reform

Over the past two decades, driven by a range of policies at state and federal levels, the electricity sector has been replacing carbon-intensive generation with zero-carbon technologies. At the same time, the sector is moving away from a small number of large-scale facilities, owned and operated by a handful of companies, toward smaller-scale, more widely-distributed, electricity production.

This exponential growth in new energy technologies, particularly in renewable energy and storage has exposed critical gaps and other weaknesses in the energy safety legislative framework. The current safety framework was developed based on the risk profiles of regulated entities in the late 1990s, which did not factor in uptake and investment in small-scale renewable or battery installations. These risks are real, with two serious incidents in 2021 underscoring the inability of Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) to regulate these facilities before these incidents occurred.

Amendments

The Bill makes amendments to the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* to allow the Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister for Energy and Resources, to declare certain electricity installations to be of a class to which certain duties and obligations apply. This would make the obligations imposed on these installations comparable with those currently imposed on major distribution and transmission companies. These include enhanced safety obligations, and the requirement to pay levies to ESV.

Other amendments will align the duties and obligations of owners and operators of electricity installations to be commensurate with those of traditional electricity market participants, such as streamlining submissions of electricity safety management plans, as well as reframing their duties aimed at minimising safety risks so far as reasonably practicable.

The Bill also amends the *Electricity Safety Act 1998*, the *Gas Safety Act 1997*, and *Pipelines Act 2005* to increase civil penalties up to sixfold from their previous amounts. Amendments will provide ESV greater control over any changes to safety management plans and the ability to conduct full revisions of these plans after five years.

The current regime allows for incremental changes to be made which cumulatively can result in significant change to safety management plans. These can be made unilaterally without any notice or acceptance by ESV, making it impracticable for ESV to monitor and enforce compliance with the safety management plans. Amendments will ensure all changes to safety management plans are agreed by ESV, and that full revision of such plans are required every five years.

The Bill will align general duties in the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* for complex electrical installations with those for electricity supply networks, and allow operators as well as owners to submit voluntary safety management plans.

The Bill will greatly strengthen ESV's investigation powers, including the preservation of serious electrical or gas incident sites, and align the period for which ESV can retain seized items. It will change the start of the period in which ESV can bring court proceedings to the time the offence comes to ESV's notice, rather than the time of commission of the offence.

The Bill will provide both ESV, as regulator under the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* and the *Gas Safety Act 1997*, and the Minister for Energy and Resources, as the regulator under the *Pipelines Act 2005*, the power to enter enforceable undertakings with regulated entities. It will also increase maximum penalties relating to maintaining safe networks.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:30): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 31 May.

Gambling Taxation Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Tim Pallas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (11:31): I rise as the opposition's lead speaker to address the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, and in doing so I would like to acknowledge the contribution in the Council of my colleagues Shadow Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation D O'Brien and Shadow Minister for Racing T Bull, who assisted me in preparing the legislation report that has been considered by not only our shadow cabinet but our joint party room as well. I am also grateful from the outset for the engagement with industry stakeholders, of which there have been many. I am grateful to each and every one of them for the way in which they have engaged quite helpfully in assisting the opposition in formulating a view on the bill before the house and the position which this side of the house has come to as well.

I might say that this bill is being considered separately to a bill that was considered in the chamber yesterday, being the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. But both bills, the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 and the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, that we address today should not in my view be seen as two separate bills. They are very much intertwined, they are very much interlinked, as demonstrated by the government via their bill briefing for the opposition, which I am also grateful for. The government extended the invitation to the opposition to receive a bill briefing not on simply two separate bills, but we covered off both bills together because there is a great link between them.

Of course the topic du jour, the key matter here, is an ongoing viable racing industry in Victoria. From the outset I just want to note some of the very significant facts relating to Victoria's racing industry. I am told that the value-added contribution of Victoria's racing industry totals something like \$4.7 billion and taxes generated by the industry, which go into the coffers of the government, total just over half a billion dollars. There are something like more than 15,000 Victorians directly employed by the Victorian racing industry, and there are just over 19,000 indirect jobs as well. So that is the context. We on this side of the house do want an ongoing viable racing industry in this state. We also understand that the racing industry wants to contribute back to our Victorian community, and I will go into that in some detail during the course of this contribution.

The purpose of this bill is to introduce new and strengthened casino tax arrangements from 1 July this year, which will be administered by the commissioner of state revenue as a taxation law under the Taxation Administration Act 1997. This bill also proposes to extend the application of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to cover casino taxes payable by the casino operator, which addresses a recommendation of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, and to consolidate provisions for and amend various gambling taxes by repealing the existing provisions for keno tax and wagering and betting tax imposed under the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and re-enacting them to provide a single legislative vehicle to address gambling taxes administered by the commissioner. It

proposes to make consequential amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991, the Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to transfer the responsibility for collecting and administering casino taxes from the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission to the commissioner and to enable the relocation of the keno tax and wagering and betting provision from the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to this legislation. Finally, the bill proposes to increase the existing point-of-consumption tax (POCT) from 10 per cent to 15 per cent, in line with New South Wales.

For those playing along at home, let me break that down into some simpler language. This bill, I think, can be seen in two parts. The first relates to changes to Crown Casino's taxation rate. Currently electronic gaming machines – otherwise referred to or known as poker machines – operated by Crown Casino are taxed at different rates to those operated by club venues. Crown Casino's pokies are taxed at a flat rate plus a community benefit levy of 1 per cent. This bill proposes that from 1 July 2023 Crown Casino's pokies be subjected to the same tax rate as pokies operated by club venues. The decision to tax Crown Casino at a higher rate follows the government's response to the royal commission into the casino operator. This change is expected to raise an additional \$30 million a year in revenue for the government.

The second part of this bill relates to the point-of-consumption tax. It is currently at 10 per cent in Victoria and this bill will increase that to 15 per cent. In relation to the point-of-consumption tax, this will align Victoria's point-of-consumption tax with that of New South Wales. Should this bill pass not only this chamber but the other place, it will bring this tax into line with that in New South Wales but it will be 5 per cent less than the point-of-consumption tax in Queensland.

The point-of-consumption tax will, with this bill, be raised from 10 per cent to 15 per cent. Through consultation with stakeholders I am advised that 4 per cent of that additional 5 per cent will go back to the racing industry, helping to provide the certainty that the racing industry requires going forward. In the mix is the consideration of the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, which effectively brings an end to the existing joint venture arrangements and puts in place the ability for a new licence agreement. The 1 per cent that does not go back to the racing industry will go into consolidated revenue.

I will be frank. I have been in conversations with industry and with my colleagues for quite some time on this potential increase in the point-of-consumption tax, and my gut response initially was to say that any cent raised by this additional tax should be going back to the industry. My views and the views of the opposition have been slightly swayed by the fact that the racing industry itself supports the arrangements that are proposed. I guess through a social licence perspective Racing Victoria and the racing industry see that, yes, they need certainty for their industry, and we get that. They have got 4 per cent of the additional 5 per cent going back to their industry guaranteed. But from a racing industry perspective, that additional 1 per cent that goes into consolidated revenue – which, frankly, in the context of things, is not really big bickies; it is between something like \$20 million and \$25 million of an additional annual tax take going into consolidated revenue – is the racing industry's opportunity to contribute to the broader Victorian picture. Whether that be to schools, hospitals, transport, police or emergency services, it is part of the racing industry's ability to acknowledge their place as part of the broader Victorian community, and we do not begrudge them wanting to do that. In fact we celebrate and encourage it.

Now, the point-of-consumption tax was of course first introduced on 1 January 2019. The majority of revenue from the tax is paid into the Hospitals and Charities Fund, with 3.5 per cent of net wagering revenue per month paid to the Victorian racing industry. This bill will allow the government to increase its payment to the racing industry from 3.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent. So it is a 15 per cent total tax take, but 7.5 per cent of that is going back to the racing industry, which we think is a good thing. This is a point which I want to be absolutely clear on. I want to be absolutely clear on this point. It is clear to me and it is clear to the opposition that the racing industry together with the government have come to an agreement. The racing industry itself, certainly Racing Victoria – and I will be addressing some of the feedback I have received from stakeholders later in this contribution – and a number of others

have agreed to this arrangement. In fact we are aware of a memorandum of understanding between Racing Victoria and the government which ensures certainty for the racing industry and is agreed to by Racing Victoria and by the government. But this is the point that I want to make absolutely clear: the agreement that has been reached between Racing Victoria and the government is not an agreement that has been reached for the remaining life of this Parliament and this government, whether that be 3½ years or beyond; this is a 10-year deal. It is through that lens that the racing industry, certainly Racing Victoria, has supported the arrangement, has signed the memorandum of understanding, has put out supportive statements in favour of this point-of-consumption tax increase and is not opposed to the legislation that is before this place today.

This is not a deal for 3½ years. This is not a deal for five years or six years or seven years – no. This is a deal for a decade. So whatever the circumstances in the future, whether they be economic circumstances or whether they be socio-cultural circumstances, the racing industry, in my view, must not – cannot – come cap in hand to a future government, whether it be the colour of the current government or the colour of a future government, to say ‘We want more’, because they will not get it. I cannot be any clearer: they will not get it. This is a deal which they have done, which they are supportive of, which they have put out supportive statements on and which they have negotiated with the government. It is the deal for a decade. I want to be really clear on that, and I suspect that government speakers will be equally clear on that arrangement as well.

I wish to address some of the matters raised by stakeholders. If you will just bear with me, I will first refer to the submission received by the opposition from Racing Victoria, who have written to me saying:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Racing Victoria (RV) position on the *Gambling Taxation Bill 2023* ...

RV supports the Victorian Government’s proposal to increase the POCT rate from 10% to 15% with the majority of the increase ... directed to the VRI. This proposal reflects the evolving wagering market and provides the industry with ongoing autonomous funding generated by the industry and linked to broader Victorian wagering and betting activity.

RV welcomes the Government’s Second Reading Speech commitment to return 7.5% of the 15% POCT to the VRI and supports the existing consultation and gazettal process to give effect to this commitment.

...

RV is aware of concerns expressed by corporate bookmakers –

I will later address some of the concerns raised by the Victorian Bookmakers Association –

that the changes proposed may cause a decline in turnover. While it is not possible to provide extensive detail on the contents of the confidential MOU, suffice to note that it contains terms relating to supplementary funding linked to anticipated outcomes which will provide long-term structural certainty for the industry.

Just on that confidential MOU, it is quite clear that the MOU that has been struck between the Victorian racing industry and the government, as my colleague the member for Gippsland East raised in his contribution on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 yesterday – the confidential MOU that has been agreed to by the racing industry and the government – has broader implications, frankly, than just the point-of-consumption tax, because it goes to the outcome of a process which has not run its course and which we do not know the outcome of as yet. That relates to what is currently referred to as the joint venture and in future will be referred to as the new licence agreement.

The government does not know – no-one knows in fact – how much that 10-year deal will be worth for the state of Victoria. We do know, however, that there is great uncertainty about the new licence process because of an issue which I am not convinced the government necessarily wants to land on. But if only they did, I think that the industry stakeholders pitching for this new licence would have greater certainty and would bid for this decade-long deal with more certainty and perhaps with more dough behind their bids. The issue of course is the question of intellectual property rights to the dataset currently held by TAB and how that relates to future licence arrangements. I think if there was greater

certainty and greater leadership from government on that particular point, the people of Victoria could be better off because of it.

It is through that lens and the commitment by the government that the industry will be no worse off as a result of any drop in value from the new licence agreement – the fact that the government have committed to the racing industry that they will top up any drop in value coming out of that new licence agreement – and the fact that all of that is covered in this confidential MOU between Racing Victoria and the government that when the decade-long deal in relation to the new licence agreement is done and it is signed off by Racing Victoria and the government I think it is in Victoria's best interest and the Victorian people's best interest for that deal, that currently confidential MOU, to be made available and made public, because we are talking about the use of taxpayer dollars. We are talking about hard-earned Victorian taxpayer dollars being used by the government to support the racing industry, which of course we all support. But because of the nature of this agreement I join with my colleague the member for Gippsland East in his contribution yesterday and suggest to this place that the currently confidential MOU should be made public and available for Victorians to see.

I will continue by conveying some feedback from other stakeholders in relation to feedback on this bill. The newly appointed chief executive officer of Responsible Wagering Australia wrote to me, and I am grateful to Kai Cantwell for doing so. RWA said the following:

RWA supports a viable system of taxation that balances the financial viability of Wagering Service Providers (WSPs) and ensures Victorian racing is supported and adequately funded. RWA believes that the move to a 15% POCT, but no more, strikes the right balance. Furthermore, RWA supports the commencement date of the increase being as close to the conclusion of the State Wagering and Betting License renewal process as possible ...

which I understand is the case. It went on to say:

RWA thanks you for your ongoing engagement and consultation with the Australian-licensed wagering industry on this and a range of other matters.

That was nice of them to mention, don't you think? It was very nice of them to mention that. The Melbourne Racing Club (MRC) also wrote to me in relation to this bill. They said:

Our feedback is specific to the wagering elements of the legislation.

...

The guaranteed share of the Point of Consumption Tax (POCT) that racing is to receive provides –
in the Melbourne Racing Club's view –

long-term certainty on industry funding beyond the expiry of the current wagering licence.

Funding derived from the change in POCT allows the racing industry to support the 25,000 FTE thoroughbred industry jobs across the state, protect investment welfare initiatives and enable racing clubs across Victoria to invest in their major race days which drive tourism and visitation to the State.

Of course the Melbourne Racing Club has Caulfield and other regional race settings as well – Mornington, Sandown. The MRC said:

Before the announcement of these Bills, the industry held concerns that the absence of funding certainty would impact the investment into racing in Victoria which would have a flow on impact to employment and our ability to grow the sport.

We do raise concerns that further increases of taxes on wagering will impact racing's major customers – the punters –

let us not forget the punters in this –

which is likely to negatively impact overall engagement with our sport. We simply raise this as a matter for consideration.

I am grateful that Jared Newton, the general manager of corporate affairs at the Melbourne Racing Club, has done so. It is a point of interest and a point of interest only.

The RWA said that they do not want the point-of-consumption tax increased any further, and the MRC said that any further increase to the point-of-consumption tax would likely negatively impact engagement with the sport, so that is a message for government quite clearly.

Now, there were two other stakeholders which I just want to address very briefly. The Alliance for Gambling Reform have written to me, saying:

The Alliance supports the increase of Crown Casino's EGM tax; however, we believe it should be in line with Hotel tax, rather than Club taxes as the casino is not a not-for-profit organisation like Clubs.

I will raise that as a point for future government consideration.

Further, the Alliance believes that unrestricted machines at the casino should be taxed more as they are more harmful due to an unrestricted maximum bet.

And further:

The Alliance also supports the increase of POCT to ensure it is in line with other states. However, a portion from the increases in tax both for the casino and bookmakers should be going directly to gambling harm prevention activities.

I should have put a little asterisk at the start of this contribution, a bit like our Twitter accounts that say 'Retweets do not necessarily mean endorsements'. I am simply reading these contributions for the benefit of the house.

Finally, the Victorian Bookmakers Association have written to me expressing great disappointment that they have not had any meaningful engagement with Racing Victoria or the government on this matter. Aha – why would that be the case? They go on and say:

We strongly believe that industry needs to be funded appropriately and we understand that the revenue model has come under pressure with a shift away from betting with oncourse bookmakers and TAB to online bookmakers.

However, our small Australian owned bookmakers appear to be the collateral damage in the exuberance to tax the large off-shore bookmakers.

The Victorian Bookmakers Association goes on to say that:

The POCT in the current construct fails to take into account a number of items for small Victorian bookmakers.

They make three points. Victorian bookmakers, in their view:

... pay a non-VTR levy (a levy on any ... events which are not Victorian Thoroughbred Races) which our counterparts in other states do not pay, and do not have an equivalent fee, other than those large bookmakers licenced in Northern Territory

Point 2, according to the Victorian Bookmakers Association:

The tax fails to take into account that small bookmakers need to provide a higher level of free bets in order to attract customers away from the large corporates and as a result the effective tax rate is significantly higher for small bookmakers.

And their final point is that:

The tax is calculated and paid monthly, for large bookmakers they don't have losing months, but for small bookmakers they are more likely to be impacted by a small group of clients and have months when they lose. This can result in a bookmaker paying POCT after a few winning months and then if they are losing in the last couple of months of the year, have no way to reclaim the tax which was paid. As a result the effective tax paid is significantly higher than the advertised rate.

I just raise that as a point of interest in this contribution because, although it is quite clear that the government has aligned some of the bigger players in the racing space to their way of thinking, it is quite clear that not everyone within the racing industry is of that opinion, which is why my recommendation on this particular bill to my colleagues, which they agree to, is that the coalition does not oppose this bill in the Assembly. We, however, reserve our right – and I have conveyed this to stakeholders; this will not be a surprise – in the Council, because later this week the member for

Gippsland East and I will be speaking with the Victorian Bookmakers Association and a couple of other stakeholders in relation to this bill. We just want to hear what they have to say. I mean, we are prepared to do the work, which according to the Victorian Bookmakers Association the government has not done, and we will be doing that later this week to get an understanding of their concerns firsthand in a conversation. We will not be opposing this legislation in this place, but we reserve our right in the Council for when this bill is considered in the Council.

In the final moments of my contribution I wish to just thank a number of stakeholders who have quite vigorously and actively engaged with the opposition – excuse me for turning my back to you, Acting Speaker – in our consultation with stakeholders. I genuinely mean that. I do not mean to have a crib. I do not mean to have a cry. I simply mean to state facts. The resources in opposition are pretty slim pickings, and so you do rely on those people who live and breathe a particular area of policy to be generous with their time, with their expertise and with their knowledge of a particular policy area to help formulate your own understanding and your own view on a particular bill before the chamber.

I wish to acknowledge and thank some of those racing and gaming industry stakeholders – the peak bodies as well. We have engaged with Entain; we have engaged with the Melbourne Racing Club; we have engaged with Racing Victoria, with Sportsbet and with Tabcorp; and we have engaged with the Alliance for Gambling Reform, Responsible Wagering Australia, the Victorian Bookmakers Association and the Australian Hotels Association. Once again, I am grateful to the government for providing a fairly lengthy bill briefing on not only this bill but the bill considered by the house yesterday. Finally, I am grateful to my colleagues for their engagement in this bill process, certainly shadow ministers Bull and Danny O'Brien for their engagement. But there were a number of colleagues who were present for the government's bill briefing, probably more than would ordinarily attend a bill briefing, which means that there is great interest in an ongoing and viable racing industry in Victoria, certainly in regional areas. The member for Mildura was present, the member for Euroa was present and the member for Nepean was present at the bill briefing, and a couple of regional members –

Jade Benham: All regional members.

Brad ROWSWELL: All regional members by one definition, member for Mildura, but all with a pretty significant racing presence in their own communities and all driven by a desire to have an ongoing viable racing industry in this state, and – I finish where I started – that is our intention in addressing this bill. Our intention in addressing this bill is to have an ongoing viable racing industry in Victoria, and that is why we will not be opposing this legislation.

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (12:01): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Safe Schools

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (12:02): I move:

That this house affirms its support for the Safe Schools program and acknowledges that it critically:

- (1) supports the well-being of all young people; and
- (2) provides valuable resources and support for teachers to foster an inclusive learning environment where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are meeting on and pay my respects to their elders past and present and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders listening in today. I recognise the resistance and the resilience of the LGBTI community within the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, who have always been present on unceded Aboriginal land. This includes the leadership of the Victorian commissioner for LGBTIQ+ communities Todd Fernando, a strong advocate for the rights and wellbeing of these communities. I want to especially thank Todd for his work in co-chairing the Department of Education's LGBTI education reference group along with the member for Eltham, Vicki Ward. Your advice and leadership are deeply appreciated.

Every day, but especially today, 17 May, IDAHOBIT, the international day against LGBTIQ+ discrimination, we stand with all Victorians for the LGBTI community. Equality, inclusivity and safety are not negotiable here in Victoria. Today is also my niece's birthday – 16-year-old Tara. She is a warrior defender of the LGBTI community in her school, and I could not be prouder of her.

This day also falls during Education Week, when we are celebrating Victoria's students, teachers and educators, so a big shout-out to all the LGBTI students, staff and families. As Minister for Education, it is a priority to ensure that you feel heard, safe, respected and seen in celebrating Victoria's education system this week.

IDAHOBIT is the anniversary of 17 May 1990, when the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the classifications of diseases, and it is hard to think that it was only in 1990 that that changed. We celebrate and remember these advancements towards LGBTIQ+ equality, but it is also a day for us to reflect on what we need to do better to support our communities. I am not sure if they are capable of doing so, but I hope those opposite are using today as an opportunity to consider the serious harm their back-bending to bigots does to the Victorian community. I know as Minister for Education and I know that every time –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, considering the importance of this issue, I would ask you to bring the minister back to the debate before the house. This is an important issue, and I am sure that the whole house supports the sentiment of it. Disgracing herself by talking otherwise is disappointing.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is no point of order. The minister to continue on the motion before us, and all will have chances to make their contributions.

Natalie HUTCHINS: I have had the opportunity to visit close to 200 schools since coming into this role. I know that every time those in the other place raise issues of absolute hatred and discrimination against this community, there is so much work that our Safe Schools teams across our schools need to do. They need to step up to ensure that schools are prepared to wrap around our students and our teachers who are experiencing negativity in their communities. Simply because those opposite cannot show some human leadership and stand up for the LGBTI community and our staff, we must constantly be vigilant in making sure we are supporting students to deal with unfortunate events of political football-making and media circuses that go on in commentary around diversity in our community.

Whilst the Leader of the Opposition would like to think that divisions are now a thing of the past, they are real and live issues that are carried on and being talked about today. Really what we need to do is make sure that our kids feel safe in their education. Some of those in the other place, as recently as June last year, said:

We need the three Rs, not affirmation ...

That is a real sign of absolute disrespect. There are some in the other place who are espousing and supporting the views of Ron DeSantis and his legislation regarding state indoctrination. Any assertion that making our classrooms safer for our children and our teachers is indoctrination, one would assume, is not just a political line for those who aspire to be in government.

Not just today but every day our government is proud to stand with the LGBTI community. To our students, our teachers and our staff, all Victorian students have a right to equitableness and excellence in their education. I know students cannot learn effectively if they are being bullied or harassed or they

MOTIONS

1720

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday 17 May 2023

feel unsafe. That is why we continue to invest in the evidence-based Safe Schools program. Delivered by the Department of Education, Safe Schools helps teachers, educators and school leaders respond to children and young people within their care with compassion and the respect that they deserve in their school environments. I am very proud of the teams that deliver this program across our school system.

Safe Schools was borne out of the need identified by school communities, by parents and by teachers for greater support for LGBTIQ+ students, who are statistically at higher risk of being bullied and of suffering poor mental health, and who are at much higher risk of suicide. A safe and inclusive environment is key to tackling bullying and harassment and preventing suicide and self-harm. The Safe Schools team provides schools with professional learning for school staff about creating more inclusive classrooms; support to prevent and respond to bullying incidents impacting LGBTIQ+ students; adopting a whole-school approach to preventing discrimination, harassment and bullying; support to review school policies and practices; development of school-led activities to create positive and inclusive change, which I have seen as I have walked around schools; consultation, advice and resources to support individual students; networking and linkages to evidence-based information resources; and local support for kids to be able to reach out where they need it, even outside the school environment. Schools determine what their needs are, what their resources should be and how best to meet them in their community. Huge thanks go out to that Safe Schools team and all of the teachers who are helping to implement this absolutely game-changing program. On any visit to a school, I can see it on obvious display, whether it be my old high school of Buckley Park, where Safe Schools posters were displayed across the school with pride, or Copperfield secondary college in my own electorate, where Safe Schools has become a part of the school agenda, with posters, support for students, professional training and of course the big day that they have every year celebrating Wear it Purple Day.

The Andrews government is investing in evidence-based school mental health and wellbeing programs and supports to ensure kids have access to the mental health tools they need to thrive at school and as they go through life's changes and choices. The full schools mental health menu is online, and it is a list of 56 evidence-based programs and initiatives designed to give schools confidence to identify programs, staff and resources to improve mental health and wellbeing for all of their students. It also enables schools to select mental health tools that best match the unique needs of their student cohorts. This is the first such program out of any state or territory in this country. And these evidence-based programs include Minus18, the LGBTIQ+ inclusion workshop for students. Schools can fund general student workshops for all secondary school students covering diversity and respect for peers, exploring ways and actions to safely support the LGBTI community in their school. Additionally, schools can organise events, such as Pride events, to support young people to explore the challenges, access support and stay connected within their own school community.

Over \$600 million has been invested in our children's and young people's mental health in schools, the single biggest investment in Australia's history. This includes \$200 million invested that delivers on the key recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System across all government primary and secondary schools, and the Andrews Labor government is making sure that kids from foundation year through to year 12 have access to a full suite of mental health tools and thrive at school. It is such important work, and our investment in supporting inclusive and safe environments for LGBTI students does not stop there.

The \$51 million mental health practitioners initiative provides funding for all government schools and specialist schools to employ a practitioner between one and five days a week based on their size and their requirements at that school. It has been fully rolled out since 2021. The practitioners are often counsellors and offer early intervention services. They support students with complex needs and deliver whole-of-school mental health promotion and prevention activities. These are the sorts of investments that this government is making that will continue to bloom for many years. We will see fantastic, outstanding results in the improvement of the wellbeing of our students.

The mental health in primary schools program is also central to the government's investment in supporting wellbeing and inclusion, and a \$200 million investment is bringing this program to life by expanding it to all government schools and low fee-paying non-government primary schools in Victoria. It will be across every school by 2026. Building on a successful pilot in 100 primary schools, every school will employ a mental health and wellbeing leader to implement a whole-of-school approach to wellbeing. This will support individual students and help teachers identify and support those kids at risk. Unfortunately, suicide amongst our young people is still such a significant issue and, quite frankly, is affecting so many families and regions across our state. We know that a child's mental health and wellbeing is crucial to their learning and development, and good mental health means children have a positive sense of identity and belonging and can cope with challenges as they arise. Mental health and wellbeing leaders are important in embedding these principles, programs and initiatives across our schools.

I cannot stand here and talk about the need for respect for the LGBTI community without touching on Respectful Relationships and the support that is rolling out across our schools and early childhood settings in regard to a model that is based on respect, positive attitudes and behaviours and teaches how to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence through a whole-of-school approach. When we embed a culture of respect and gender equity across our entire school community, all students benefit, including through positive impacts on their academic outcomes and their general engagement at school.

Over 1950 Victorian schools, including Catholic and independent schools, are signed onto the Respectful Relationships program, and that includes all government schools, acquitting a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. I have got to say that 13 years ago when I came into this place it was very obvious that we needed such a program in our schools and in our communities, and it is an absolute pleasure of mine to be able to see this program being embedded in schools and making a difference. At every single school I go to I ask them how Respectful Relationships is rolling out, and the answer is always 'absolutely fantastic'. I think the only challenge we still have left in this space is the feedback that I get from teachers and leaders in schools who say, 'If only we could apply this to some of our parents.' That in itself is an ongoing challenge that we may need to face as a government.

Lastly, I have gotten a lot of negative attention on my social media in the last week as I stood up in this place and said that I stand for all women across this state, including trans women. I was attacked and my office was bombarded, unfortunately, with negativity. But I am not going to be deterred by hate or bigotry, and neither will my staff. Hear me again as I say as Minister for Women that I am proud to represent and advocate for the rights and interests of all Victorian women – that includes non-binary people, that includes black women, that includes women of all different ages, backgrounds and abilities and that includes trans women.

Safe Schools is an integral part of Victoria's education system. I have heard from teachers, students and principals. As long as we see the sort of unconsidered hate that we have seen from those in the other place, who have spread bigotry and continue to attack our LGBTIQ+ children and young people, we will continue to invest in supports and we will continue to help children and young people get the education that they deserve in place. We will help support our educators, who are themselves from very diverse backgrounds, with some from the LGBTI community. We will help them to continue to work in safe environments and to teach in safe environments and for kids to learn in safe environments so they continue to succeed.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:18): I rise to make a contribution to the notice of motion that was popped on the notice paper yesterday by the Minister for Education and that we are discussing today. I would expect that that is because today is IDAHOBIT. I want to begin by giving a bit of a shout-out to all my friends and extended family who belong in those categories and really to those who have found their place in society and a lot of younger members who are finding their place in society and in the world. Things are quite different now, and I think people are starting to find their voice, find

their confidence and stand up and be who they are and be happy and proud of who they are rather than hiding it for decades, which is probably what happened to people of my parents' era. Things have changed a lot, and schools are doing their bit to help out with removing and fighting against discrimination, certainly against those in the LGBTQIA+ communities.

We know that if people are a little bit different or people think they are a little bit different, the schoolyard can be a difficult place. I guess a lot of us have seen that and a lot of us have experienced how difficult kids can be and how nasty kids can be. Some of the things that they do and say can really live with somebody forever. People do remember. You have people speak to you, and regardless of whether they have come from a background overseas and moved to Australia and do not speak the language properly or whether their sexual orientation is a bit different, it can be difficult. Kids are pretty ruthless and can attack fairly quickly, but I see now that there is a lot of work done in schools by the schools and by the school community to really help kids find their confidence and be a lot more comfortable in themselves but also respect those who are different from themselves. I think we all need to take a bit of a look at ourselves and make sure that we are respectful of each other all the time. I know sometimes in this house the debate is anything but respectful and the way some people behave at times is not. Hopefully the generation coming after us may be a little bit more so.

We know that schools need to be safe places; we know schools need to be inclusive. Kids spend the vast majority of their youth in school. If kids have got a lousy life at home for whatever reason, school should be a really safe place. It is like a sporting club – it should be somewhere they are safe and happy to go if life is bad at home. You do not want kids who do not have a great home life coming to school and having a really lousy experience there as well. So there is a lot of work that is being done with schools to really help build and promote safety.

I have just had a look at the Department of Education's website on school staff and what they might do to get support and advice on matters in relation to a whole host of things about how to satisfy the policies on sexual and gender diversity and both the Victorian and the Australian anti-discrimination legislation. Teachers are having a look at what they need to do and how they need to do it, but they need to have the resources that are there to do it. There is also information about preventing and responding to bullying of LGBTIQ+ students and looking at a whole-school approach to preventing discrimination, harassment and bullying. I see a lot of this in practice when I go to schools, and I will talk about that a little bit later. They need to be working to create supportive and inclusive school policies, and I see evidence of that. There is advice on how to train staff on creating supportive spaces for LGBTQIA+ students – and that would look a little bit different at primary schools and secondary schools no doubt; how to develop student-led activities to create positive, inclusive change; and how to equip other staff with the skills and ideas to create inclusive environments.

All of this is part of the efforts to create safe and inclusive environments, because as I said, students spend the vast majority of their time – they get pretty good holidays, mind you – and the majority of each day within the classroom and within the schoolyard and being subjected to kids who are not always open to different people. Sometimes they just repeat things and say things that they have heard, and they do not actually feel this deep-seated hatred or bigotry or anything like that. They just repeat things, which may not be a good thing in the longer term certainly.

We know kids need to be safe, so I have had a look at what sorts of messages the schools are sending. If we have a look at Healesville Primary School, for example, they inspire students to be curious, creative and engaged lifelong learners, but they want to develop resilient, confident and respectful students who have the necessary skills to be valuable members of the community. If we look at that – respectful students – this says a lot about Safe Schools: to be respectful of people who are different from you.

As I was having a look at these different schools I thought there must be a Department of Education issued template, because a lot of them had very similar policy statements. Mansfield Primary School is committed to providing a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for all students, staff and

members of their community. The school recognises the importance of the partnership between schools and parents and carers to support learning, engagement and wellbeing. But this is the important bit: they have a commitment to and a responsibility for creating an inclusive and safe school environment for students. And their vision at Mansfield Primary is to inspire, challenge, support and make a difference. When we have those words embedded – ‘inclusive’, ‘respectful’, ‘support’ – I think we are setting the foundation for children to grow up with those as part of their core being.

Panton Hill Primary School are looking to a working partnership between parents and staff, a safe and well-maintained working environment and a well-balanced and challenging curriculum. Their values, which they celebrate at monthly morning assemblies, are respect, cooperation, determination, enthusiasm and honesty. I think the respect and honesty are about kids having a look at themselves and the core of their own character and values, and I continue to see this embedded.

I have just got a couple more that I want to have a look at. Launching Place Primary School’s five core values make the word ‘carer’: curiosity – they ask questions to learn; achievement – they persist and try their best; responsibility – they are in control of their learning and actions; empathy – they treat others with care and compassion; respect – they show care and compassion for others and their environment. It does not matter where in my electorate you go, from the Mansfield shire to the Murrindindi shire, Nillumbik or the Yarra Ranges, all of the schools have this embedded now in their values.

I go to a lot of school assemblies. I have some 50 schools in my electorate. The vast majority are primary schools; there are only about six or seven secondary schools. When I go to these schools and I see what the children are being celebrated for, it is that inclusion, it is that diversity and it is that respectful nature that they have with other people. It does not discriminate based on where they have come from or what their background is. And if they are trying to find their path in life and whether that is as part of the LGBTIQ+ community, that is included in the respect for, understanding of and support for those children. It is a little bit different at primary school than at secondary school. I had a look at Yea High School, the school that I went to, and again the whole school has developed their three keys to supporting a harmonious learning environment – respect, trust and acceptance – and they underpin the school’s motto ‘Strive to excel’. I think that schools are generally doing a really good job out there of trying to create a very safe environment for their students.

I have, as I said, loads of schools. I have loads of conversations with principals, with teachers and with families, and there have been a number of elements I do feel compelled to raise where schools have had a bit of a change and the safety of students has been jeopardised. While the motion today about Safe Schools is really about IDAHOBIT, we do have issues post COVID. COVID did enormous damage to our students and to our kids who were not at school yet, the preps in primary schools and kids transitioning to secondary schools. I spoke to a principal who has always been chipper, really looking forward to every day and really taking on the challenges of being school principal. They are not always easy jobs –

Michaela Settle: Well, they give us a holiday each year.

Cindy McLEISH: Having been a teacher myself, I do know that you appreciated the school holidays, let me tell you, and I was usually sick for the first week of the holidays because I was so exhausted. But one of the things that this principal said to me was, ‘I’ve never had knives at my school, and post COVID, teenage boys that had been away for two years have come back with knives.’ He was devastated. I could just see the difference in his demeanour in discussing with me the seriousness and the concerns he felt about why the kids had knives, how they were using them at the school and how that would be a threat to the safety of other students. I have had a primary school contact me about a child with a knife ready to take it to his mother. The principal was able to calm him. She is a principal I have an enormous amount of respect for. We had to get the minister and the department to help in that instance to deal with it. But knives at school is something that I am gravely concerned about.

I have a friend who teaches in the south-eastern suburbs. Deb has been a teacher for a very long time, and she now feels defeated. She feels defeated because of COVID and what has happened to the students. She is a primary school teacher. She is energetic, happy and bubbly, and I know she would be a great teacher just from her personality. The discipline, the way that kids do not always respect each other, how they behave and how they treat the teachers are really quite difficult. But what she said to me broke her heart. Post COVID saw primary school children returning having watched porn, and she thought that was so out of place. What is this doing to these children? What are they telling other people, and how endangering is it for them to talk to other students? These are primary school students; this is not safe. When they are talking to other students about what they have seen, this is a big concern.

We have also had parents and families raising concerns about bullying and how bullying is handled, and I know it is a really tough thing. I have been at schools being principal for a day where they have had welfare meetings with the leadership team and their welfare officers to talk about some of these issues, and they are hard; they are difficult. What they find is they just do not have enough support; they do not have the mental health practitioner support. In country areas it is much harder to find people to fill these positions. We have workforce shortages in so many areas. We cannot all have psychologists and social workers there. We have counsellors and we have chaplains all trying to help fill this space, to help kids fit in and to help kids understand how you respect each other and what you can do.

We have had parents talk to us about vaping and chroming and some of these things that happen in the toilets at schools. When you get one group doing it and others are interested, and if they are at vulnerable ages, this is terrible. And there is chroming as well and things that happen on the school buses, not just in the toilets. And I do want to just briefly mention the 13-year-old year 8 Lilydale High School student Esra Haynes, who went into cardiac arrest minutes after inhaling deodorant. She spent a week on life support and died on 8 April, and her parents Paul and Andrea and her three siblings are doing it very tough. They just are broken-hearted, obviously, about this, but they want to see action in this space, because some of these activities that happen at school, that go into the schoolyard, that go onto the school bus, are really dangerous for children. We saw that Nine News published that there was a 161 per cent increase in inhalant presentations last year at Victoria's Austin Hospital. Post that incident, the Department of Education sent out an updated drug education resource to all government schools to provide students with a clear understanding of the dangers associated with chroming and inhalant abuse, and they have online modules and learning activities. So they have been very quick to respond, but again, we have seen the tragedy of a young 13-year-old's life being taken.

As we are working to create safe schools I think we really need to have a good look at how far and wide we extend that. A number of people in this place have met with Matt Cronin, the father of 19-year-old Pat, who was punched in the back of the head, a coward's punch. A brawl broke out at a Diamond Creek hotel and he stepped in to pull somebody away. The Pat Cronin Foundation is doing a lot of work with school-aged children to raise awareness of the coward punch and to try and bring this to an end. I know when Matt spoke to me he talked about how the department said the work around this really fits in the Safe Schools environment space, and that is why am raising it now, because there is a lot that can fit into this Safe Schools space. Regardless of where kids are when they are growing up, they need to have support to be themselves. If they are of the LGBTQIA+ community – and let us be frank, as kids are young, that is when they are first trying to work out their direction in life and how they will cope with it and what supports they need – it is most important at that school age that people are aware of what that looks like, what sort of support people need and what they do not need, what support looks like and what support does not look like, what bullying looks like and what it does not look like and what discrimination looks like and what it does not look like. As kids move into the workforce they should be having exactly those same experiences, and that is not necessarily the case. We know that there are some workplaces that still have a lot to learn in this bullying space, and we do know still that people of different sexual orientation are at times subject to discrimination. I think we have made a lot of movement in this space, particularly you notice that

unisex toilets and things like that are now being rolled out very broadly and accepted as the norm, and it should be the norm that people are comfortable to be who they are and where they are.

Lastly, I do want to mention that students in the LGBTIQ+ category are at higher risk of bullying and of suicide. We have way too much suicide in our community and way too much youth suicide. A couple of years ago one of my cousins began work with the coroner and the first thing she said to me was 'This suicide is awful'. She did say it was across all ages, but when kids are younger we should have the resources around them while they are at school to help them to deal with it. As people get older and they move in various things they are not always around the supports and do not always have them. But at school they should have those supports, and we need to make sure that they are respected and not discriminated against.

One suicide has been quite highly promoted through Dolly's Dream across the Northern Territory and Queensland. Her parents did not see it coming. I have friends who are principals of schools in Victoria where kids have suicided who did not see it coming and said they would never have picked those kids that have taken their own lives. There was a spate down in Geelong a few years ago. In the whole region I think there may have been six school-aged students who took their lives, and that is tragic. That is something that we need to prevent regardless of what faith they are, what sexual orientation they are, where they grew up, whatever. We need to make sure that everyone is not subjected to discrimination. We have still got a little way to go, but we certainly need our schools to be playing their role in that.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:37): I am really pleased to rise to speak on this motion that the house affirms support for the Safe Schools program. I would like to comment on the contribution from the member for Eildon. It was a fairly interesting and meandering contribution which really avoided facing the fact that Safe Schools is a program. What we heard there in that contribution was some sort of idea that it was around safety in schools. We heard about things like vaping and bullying, all sorts of things, but the member completely avoided acknowledging the very purpose behind the Safe Schools program, and I will tell you why –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member on her feet is trying to rewrite history and missed the point completely.

Members interjecting.

Cindy McLeish: You are impugning me.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not need assistance from the member. There is no point of order. It is a matter of debate.

Michaela SETTLE: As I was saying, the reason, I think, that we had a contribution like that is because those on the other side need to remember that they went to the 2018 election with a commitment to get rid of Safe Schools. The member for Eildon sat in this chamber, sat in that party room and supported the member for Bulleen's commitment to get rid of Safe Schools. Let us not forget that. Let us not forget that those on the other side of the house wanted to get rid of this incredibly important program.

I would also like to acknowledge the extraordinary work of the Minister for Education, and I am delighted to follow her in speaking about this. Her commitment to kids in schools and the education system and to protecting everyone in that system has been extraordinary, and that is really clear in all the work that has been done. While those on the other side would like to equate the Safe Schools program with vaping and issues around vaping, for me it is very clear that this program is about protecting our LGBTI kids.

I grew up in Castlemaine in the 1970s – in 1977 I moved to Castlemaine – and I became instant and firm friends with Michael. Michael and I are lifelong friends, and he still lives around the corner from me today in Ballarat. Michael and I spent our entire childhood running from him being beaten up and

bullied because he was a young gay man in the 1970s in regional Victoria and it was a really, really rough time. He and I still talk about some of those experiences that we went through.

While those on the other side sought to get rid of the Safe Schools program in 2018 – they kind of thought that it would just all work itself out – what I would say to them is that having gone through that experience, we need firm and clear action to protect those people in our community and particularly in our schools. It is something that this government has never, ever shied away from. My heart beats a little faster every time I hear our Premier say loud and clear that in this state it is not negotiable – equality is not negotiable. It is one thing that this government has stood firm and clear on.

Before we go into the wonders of the Safe Schools program, we are discussing this today because it is an incredibly important day, IDAHOBIT. I am really delighted to stand as an ally with my LGBTQI+ communities on such an important day as this. This morning at 10 o'clock the Moorabool council raised the IDAHOBIT flag, the rainbow flag, for the first time, and that means that we had every local government across Victoria raising that flag today. Every local government in Victoria showed the support that this government has always shown for our LGBTI communities.

It is an incredibly important program, Safe Schools. It works to support staff and teachers to understand the issues that kids are facing. I know that often if you are not from a community like that it is hard to see through the lens, if you like, of those experiences. I know that our wonderful teachers are always there for all of their kids – unlike the member for Eildon, who seems to think they take a lot of holidays. I know that the teachers that I deal with work very, very hard. Having said that, it is really good to have resources and supportive resources around them so that they can make sure that they are really offering the best support for kids in those communities.

This government has done some really extraordinary things in this space, and I am incredibly proud. I love it when Minister Shing, the Minister for Equality, comes to visit Ballarat. She lights up the world that she walks into, and we were really delighted to have her just last year come and announce regional safe spaces. This is yet another thing. We can do it within schools, but we also need to make sure that young people in the broader community also have those safe spaces. It is incredibly important funding that is working with Child and Family Services in Ballarat to make sure we have those safe spaces for young people.

But of course it is always about being seen. You have got to see to know and recognise, and so I think things like the Victoria's Pride program are incredibly important. Pride has been a big part of Melbourne's life, but I live in the regions; I want to make sure that those kids that are out there like my best buddy Michael can look out amongst their community and see support there. Victoria's Pride was an extraordinary announcement this year which really guaranteed that some of those Pride festivals could be rolled out across regional Victoria, not just here in Melbourne.

IDAHOBIT really is a day to reflect on how far we have come. It was 1969 when Stonewall first happened, an extraordinary event. I would say that it was in many ways led by a lot of people in the trans community. They stood up for the first time and said, 'We're not going to take this oppression anymore.' Stonewall was a fundamental moment in our history and in the history of the LGBTQI community. As many people know, I had the absolute honour of working for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in the late 1980s and early 90s, and it was a fundamental experience for me. I often say it is what politicised me, and it politicised me because I saw a community come together to really create change. We learned a lot of things, I learned a lot of things throughout that. It was about, for example, language and the different ways that language can affect people. But there is one lesson I did learn which to this day kind of fills me with horror. I remember going to a discussion group about people who were being bashed, and they were still being bashed in Sydney in the 1990s. There was a lesson around how to deal with that. What they said is that you should identify someone – for example, you might say, 'You in the pink suit, please help me' – because you had to make that direct ask for someone to come to your help and your assistance.

When I think back on those sort of moments and having to listen to those sorts of things, Safe Schools to me is really such an incredibly important program, because it is teaching not just the LGBTI kids but all of the school community and teachers alike to understand and to stand as allies. We know that LGBTQI kids have a much higher risk of bullying and suicide, so this program is important for them.

I was absolutely delighted to go to the story time reading at 10:30 today here in Parliament. We had some wonderful people from our transgender community come and read stories for us. It was open to all members, but it was largely this side of the house; I do not remember seeing anyone from the other side of the house there. But it was really delightful to stand by those communities, to stand by transgender people in our community.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would put to you that the motion before the house is quite specific, and the member misled the house. The opposition were not invited, disappointingly. I did personally go to the Premier's office and raise my disappointment that the government would play politics in not providing an invitation to the whole house, and on that point I would ask you to bring the member back to the question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, that is a matter for debate that the member will have his chance to respond to. There is no point of order. The member's time has expired.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (12:47): I rise today to speak on the motion put by the Minister for Education, which is around affirming support for the Safe Schools program, acknowledging that it critically supports the wellbeing of all young people and provides valuable resources and support for teachers to foster an inclusive learning environment where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. These are things that I absolutely agree with. We want to make sure that we support the mental health and wellbeing of all young people. We also want to make sure that every school student in Victoria is provided with sufficient resources and supports to make sure that they feel safe and they have got the opportunity to learn and to grow and to become those fabulous adults they will be in the future. They are our bright future, and that is where we need to invest.

I would like to take up the comments by the member for Eureka around the drag queen story time today. I just want to make it really clear that none of the members of the opposition were actually invited to that event, and in terms of –

Members interjecting.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Lowan is misleading the house. The Minister for Equality spoke to the member for Kew and extended an invitation to the entire opposition.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, in the conversation that occurred there were no details of when, where or the time of the event. The shadow minister was not invited. That is absolutely true. That is outrageous.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members, come to order. This is the same point of order that the member for Brighton raised before, that he mentioned. This is a matter for debate. Let us all try and be civil. The member for Lowan has the call.

Emma KEALY: As I was saying, I was not invited. No members over here were invited. Certainly I would expect if you are seeking to have and show and demonstrate true inclusivity, then please, like we do for many other events in this place, do not politicise events. We make sure that everybody is at least extended the courtesy of an invitation to attend such an event. As for this being misportrayed by Labor members saying 'You didn't go', I would encourage them to in fact look at putting out those wider invitations. That is very important.

Michaela Settle interjected.

Emma KEALY: I will take on the interjections, which I know is not parliamentary of me. I will take up the interjection from the member for Eureka because she seems to not understand that I am a National Party member, and there is a process that we look at when we are considering different ways for all sides of the Parliament to be able to engage with these sort of activities.

Now, if there are going to be parliamentary ‘friends of’ events and if there are going to be parliamentary events where we are looking at supporting people in our community who are doing different things, and if the government are truly supportive of that and want to make a difference and show that unity of support of the Parliament in Victoria, then the very least the government could do would be to send a simple calendar invitation – an email – out to every single member of this chamber. To not do that is actually incredibly divisive, and it caused an immense amount of harm to the communities that they purport to represent. By being able to –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Emma KEALY: It is interesting that Labor MPs are so quick to get vicious about this and make this a personal attack. They could come from the high ground if they had made the effort to simply circulate an email to all MPs. It is not a very difficult thing to do. There is even a shortcut email address that would have been easy for them to use. In fact I am sure that they had their own calendar item and could have just added us to it. It is not a difficult thing to do. If they are truly supportive of communities that are often marginalised and not included, then surely they should have taken the moral high ground and ensured that we were invited, because I would have been delighted to attend. I would have been absolutely delighted to attend. I want to make sure that that is on the record. Maybe courtesy and respect for not just me but also the community that are looking to do story time should have been shown by the government rather than trying to do this very, very disappointing pointscore exercise that we saw earlier today.

I would also like to recognise that today is IDAHOBIT, and for our communities in far western Victoria, that is something that we do take very seriously. I am very, very proud of the fact that our communities are very supportive of people with all sorts of differences. We are proud that what brings us together is that we live in country Victoria, a long way from Melbourne, which is a really good way to unite us all, I must admit – that we can look at what makes us different in that regard. We do not really care much about your gender identity. We do not care about your sexuality. We do not care about your religion or where you grew up. We do not care if your family were here six generations ago – if you have that history in our region – or whether you go back hundreds of thousands of years. We do not care whether you arrived by boat. We do not care if you arrived by plane. We all value every single person we have in our community. That is why we also see enormous support for the LGBTIQ+ community.

I know there are events in my community today. I know that there will be many rainbow flags out today. I just want to make it really clear that while country people are sometimes persecuted and put in this box saying that they are rednecks and that they do not support any differences, that is absolutely not my experience as a local member of Parliament. It is not my experience, having lived in the area for 40-plus years. I absolutely commend our community and how they support everybody to be their very, very best. That even goes as far as our education system, which of course this is around. I certainly know of a transgender child who is well supported by a Catholic primary school in the local area. It should never be a matter of making this an issue of division or of debate about religious bodies being against people who are transgender. I am not seeing that in my own community. I think, again, it is unfair and divisive for this to be translated into a religious argument, because in my experience religious communities are very supportive of individuals who have gender dysmorphia. Certainly, as this school well knows, I have always given them full credit for their treatment of that student but also of their family, which is something we can be very, very proud of.

It is so important that we do have good supports for the wellbeing of all of our young people. We know that access to mental health support is absolutely essential, particularly after what we have seen over the past three or so years with the COVID pandemic. It has hit our young people the hardest, and we have seen perhaps the impact of some of that just today with reports that the literacy results for grade 4 students in Victoria has actually fallen well behind those in other states. There is a push at the moment, and there has been for a number of years, to make sure Victoria pushes ahead more strongly with phonics education. It is something that is delivered in my son's school, and as a result he is an excellent reader, to his credit. But there are other students who have fallen well behind over COVID. I do urge the government to make sure that there is appropriate educational support so the teachers can deliver that support in the best way possible but also that we can have the infrastructure for schools too.

Something referred to in the second part of this motion is around making sure that we have the resources and support for teachers to foster an inclusive learning environment, and that includes making sure that we have schools that are up to scratch. We have seen funding delivered for Minyip Primary School for works done, but we have basically got a whole building which has been irreparably damaged. It is nearly nine months after the works were done, and the building has been deemed unsafe. The government are not taking action to fix the Minyip Primary School. I urge them to urgently intervene. Casterton Primary School was issued some funding over a year ago now, and the project has just grown and grown through the Victorian School Building Authority – to the point where now they will be lucky if they are going to get a new lick of paint and some carpet. The money is just being chewed up through consultant fees. We need to see more money allocated in this budget to make sure they can finish that project in full. At Stawell Primary School it is exactly the same. They were allocated money for their oval upgrade a number of years ago. There are now basically massive potholes in the oval, which are a real danger to the kids. There are other areas of that school that need a desperate injection of money, and I urge the government to attend to that in this year's budget.

Rainbow P-12 College is in a very similar situation to that of Casterton Primary School, where the promise was for a really impressive upgrade of their building, but money has just been chewed up by consultancy fees. I urge the government to deliver a full amount of money for those projects but also to fund the Dunmunkle early years centre in Murtoa. It was the one commitment for the Lowan electorate in the last year, and I urge for the funding to be in this budget.

Vicki WARD (Eltham) (12:57): I stand here feeling both pretty angry but also incredibly joyful because of the things that are happening in my community right now. Before anybody on the other side wants to interject and say that I am going off topic, let me start by saying that my magnificent Eltham High School was one of the first pilot schools for Safe Schools in 2010 and has shown extraordinary leadership when it comes to inclusion. The work that they do is phenomenal, and I shout out to principal Vincent Sicari and all in that community for the phenomenal work that they do. As a parent at Eltham High School I could not be prouder of my school and the work that they do – just as today I am incredibly proud of my community in standing up for the bigots that descended down in Eltham and were thwarted. My community stood up, and they stood up with friends, to say that bigotry and hatred have no place in the community. My community stood up in 2016 and stared the racists down with butterflies, and we did it again today with rainbow butterflies, with song and with joy.

Drag reading time did go ahead in Eltham today. It was successful and it was beautiful, because people are beautiful. The joy that comes with the rainbow community and that comes with our drag queens is extraordinary, and for these bigots, these Nazis, these haters to try and shut people down for being who they are – for celebrating who they are, for being inclusive, for having the generosity to come to us and everybody in our community and say 'Let us share our love with you. Let us share our stories' – and to want to threaten to shut them down with violence and with aggression is absolutely disgraceful. I am so proud of the people who went to Eltham Library today and stood out there in their angel wings, who stood out there in their rainbows of colours and who sang songs, listened to stories and celebrated who they are and the joy of who they are. I am incredibly grateful. I know it is lunchtime. Do you want me to stop?

A member: Yes, please.

Vicki WARD: That is not called for. That is really not called for. I am really emotional about what happened in my community. That is not called for.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Members

Minister for Mental Health

Absence

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:02): I rise to inform the house that the Minister for Mental Health is absent from question time today. Questions for the portfolios of mental health and ambulance services will be answered by the Minister for Health. Questions for the portfolio of treaty and First Peoples will be answered by the Minister for Education.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Federal health funding

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Health. In last week's federal Labor budget Victoria only received \$55 million towards community health, hospitals and infrastructure projects over the next two years – a quarter of the amount allocated to New South Wales. Why has the minister failed to secure Victoria's fair share of health infrastructure funding?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:03): I welcome the question from the member for Lowan, who yesterday took us on a trip down memory lane with a question relating to something that happened back in 2016 under the Turnbull government. So let me take this opportunity to remind the member –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, I think you will expect this, but on relevance, this question is specific to the minister failing to secure Victoria's fair share of health infrastructure funding. She had an opportunity to answer that question yesterday. She did not know. Perhaps she should have done her research and answered it yesterday.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I would ask members not to elaborate in their points of order. The Minister for Health had only just commenced her answer. She was being relevant, and I think she was about to provide some context.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Indeed I was. I think it is important that the house understand that over the time that our government has been in office here in Victoria we have been systematically neglected by the former federal Liberal–National coalition government and not a peep did we ever hear from those on the other side. Not once did they ask us or back us in when we were fighting for Victoria's fair share of health funding. I might take this opportunity, given that I have been asked about federal budgets, to remind the member for Lowan that under the previous Liberal–National coalition government we saw the former health minister, now deputy opposition leader, deliver the biggest cut to hospital funding in history. We had a government that destroyed primary care. Primary care under the previous Liberal–National federal government was broken.

Members interjecting.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, on relevance, this question was specific to the federal Labor government's budget handed down just last week, when Victoria got \$55 million and New South Wales got \$210 million.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: On the point of order, the member for Lowan has asked me about the Victorian government's advocacy in relation to federal government budgets. There is a story to be told here and one that I know that members of the house are wanting to hear.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister was referring to federal budget funding as well as infrastructure funding for health. The minister was being responsive to the question. I ask the minister to come back to the answer.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, we have advocated in the entire time that we have been in government to the federal government for our fair share of funding when it comes to health funding, and I have got to say that we were comprehensively neglected by the former Liberal–National government. That is why it is now good to have a partner in Canberra, one that we can work with and one that is looking to partner with us to firstly improve primary care, which is a key responsibility of the federal government and one which was comprehensively neglected. Fixing Medicare has to be the key priority for any federal government, because if Medicare is fixed we will see a real impact on our system. At the moment we are carrying the load of primary care as well as acute care. I thank the member on the other side for her question, and I look forward to hearing more from her.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:07): Is the minister's failure to secure federal health infrastructure funding the reason that the upgrade of Daylesford hospital will not happen?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:07): Let me make this point: no government in the history of this nation has invested more money into health infrastructure than the Andrews Labor government. Every single day we consider the needs of our health services right across the state, and we make those decisions based on where the need is greatest for that investment.

Ministers statements: LGBTIQA+ equality

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:08): Victoria is a great place because of its diversity, and under the leadership of this government we have worked to ensure everyone feels like they have a place in Victoria and feels safe in Victoria. It is not just a basic foundation of leadership to want people to feel safe, it is also basic logic. If more people feel included, there are more people in work, at shows or reading in public libraries. As a government we are grateful to the LGBTI community for their contribution to our society, so we invest in these contributions and grow these opportunities. Our Pride Events and Festivals Fund supports 37 events across this state, including Midsumma and Melbourne's Trans and Gender Diverse Film Festival.

In our government equality is celebrated, and that is part of what makes us the creative and cultural capital of the country. I am proud that, in contrast to those opposite, our party room reflects not just the views of the Victorian people but their diversity. Our difference is our difference. We have more than five times as many MPs with a non-European background. We have two openly gay ministers, which is about 10 per cent of the cabinet. We have proud members of the queer community in our party room and, crucially, over 50 per cent of our caucus and our cabinet are women.

If the Liberal Party is serious about representative democracy and if they want to be taken seriously, they do not need a vote in their party room, they need a mirror. It might help them see a pattern. In 2018, after campaigning on a racial gang crisis, in the aftermath we saw a neo-Nazi rally on St Kilda Beach. In 2021, after campaigning against health advice, we saw rallying extremists on the front steps of Parliament. And recently we saw the Leader of the Opposition green-lighting story time protests,

which threatened the safety of councillors, children and families. If the Liberal Party want to know how to stop this pattern of association with extremist views and extremist groups, they do not need a vote in their party room, they need a mirror.

Ambulance services

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:10): My question is to the Minister for Health, who is answering questions for the Minister for Ambulance Services. On 9 November 2022 there were a hundred and –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Premier will come to order.

Emma KEALY: On 9 November 2022 there were 110 Victorians waiting –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition! Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, I would like to hear the question in silence. This is not a good example for the new members of Parliament.

Emma KEALY: Thank you, Speaker. On 9 November 2022 there were 110 Victorians waiting for an ambulance, and reduced fleet availability. Why was a code red not called?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:11): The decisions about whether or not code red or indeed a code orange are called are entirely made by Ambulance Victoria and the clinicians within that organisation.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:11): How many times was the rapid off-load strategy enacted in November 2022?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:11): Well, once again, operational decisions are made by clinicians at Ambulance Victoria and indeed in our health services. These are made according to demand at the time.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was how many times –

The SPEAKER: I am aware of the question, member for Lowan. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ support

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:12): Today is International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, and as I have said before in this place, I stand with and beside the LGBTIQ+ children and young people, their families, teachers and staff across all of our schools, not just today but every day. We are investing in Safe Schools as well as LGBTIQ+ organisations like Minus18. Through our \$200 million Schools Mental Health Fund and Menu, schools are also doing this great work to make learning environments safer and more inclusive; whether it is putting up rainbow flags or Pride posters, I have seen it across all of our schools. I am really investing in professional development and learning, better supports for LGBTI+ communities and students across our schools, and creating rainbow peer support groups in regional and metropolitan schools. Our schools and so many students are taking on the challenge to give all young people the education and chances they deserve.

I wish I could say the same for those opposite. Rather than supporting inclusivity, all they do is offer tough love and parenting advice stuck in the 1950s, a time when same-sex relationships were taboo, illegal or sometimes even classed as a disease. We know better, Victorian students know better and Victorian teachers know better. Today is the day when we can recommit to standing with and beside LGBTI children and young people, and keeping our schools safe.

Level crossing removals

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:14): My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. A former Labor staffer's business Qdos has been paid by the minister's department as part of a secretive program to monitor the views of Victorians. When did the minister first become aware that Qdos had been contracted to do this work?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:14): I thank the shadow minister and the member for Caulfield for his question and ongoing declaration of the opposition that he runs to each and every one of our removal of 110 dangerous level crossings across the suburbs of Melbourne. In terms of the reference to the company he mentions, I can advise the house that Qdos are one of a number of companies that are engaged, appropriately through the level crossing removal authority, to engage with the community on guess what – talking to the community about what they would like to see through the removal of 110 dangerous and congested level crossings.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question. We are not interested necessarily in what the Qdos company is doing, but when the minister was actually informed that this contract was given to her Labor mates. When was this contract given to her Labor mates?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield has been told several times that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. I remind members of that if they are asking a question and taking points of order. The Minister for Transport and Infrastructure was being relevant to the question that was asked around transport infrastructure and the contract.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. In case the member for Caulfield missed it as he was busy filling his head with how he could next oppose the removal of 110 dangerous and congested level crossings, as I indicated the company is one of a number that is engaged by the level crossing removal authority through the major transport infrastructure agency to assist us in removing 110 dangerous and congested level crossings across the City of Melbourne. One of the activities that those companies are engaged in, as I indicated, is talking to local communities about not only how we can make those communities safer, not only how we can reduce road congestion around the removal of level crossings, not only how we can build new train stations but indeed how we can support other community activities. I have got some examples for the member for Caulfield. The member for Preston will be fully aware of this, as the member for Northcote will be as well. When we went in and said we were going to remove the level crossing on Bell Street, the community said 'Can you do the other three around it' in response to the work that was undertaken by these organisations.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, I would just ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question. We asked for a date. That is all we want: a simple date. When did the minister first become aware –

The SPEAKER: Order! I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question. She was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. We are proud to have a first-class community engagement program that works with communities on things like station designs and bike paths and sporting facilities and open space. For example, the member for Box Hill and I are going next week to not only two dangerous and congested level crossings where two women lost their lives at this level crossing on Union Road at Surrey Hills, but we also had the opportunity through an extensive conversation with the community to make sure that we could put a deck over the area of the trench at Mont Albert and retain that station for future community use. These are the sorts of examples where, when you have a policy commitment to remove 110 dangerous and congested level crossings, a commitment –

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister's time has expired.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:18): Did the minister or her office have any involvement in the awarding of the taxpayer-funded contracts to Qdos?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:19): This says it all about how those opposite would operate if they were in government. I can categorically put on the record that decisions like this are made by the level crossing removal authority and officials in the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority. They are made at that level as is appropriate across the public service, who are authorised to make these decisions. In that decision-making it was a very deliberate decision, a policy setting of the government, that we wanted to engage with the community and consult. But I will say this: it is true that we have not listened to everyone. It is true that we have not listened to everyone.

A member interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: We did not listen to you. We did not listen to you, did we?

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister is warned.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was simply about when her office or she was first aware of these contracts. I ask you to bring her back to the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister was being relevant to the question. Has the minister concluded her answer?

Jacinta ALLAN: I've got more –

Ministers statements: LGBTIQA+ support

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:20): I rise today to update the house on the outstanding achievements of our 79 Victorian local councils. I am proud to say that today, IDAHOBIT day, all 79 councils are flying the rainbow flag to signify their commitment to diversity and inclusion. It is the first time in any jurisdiction across the world that every local council has flown the rainbow flag on this day, and it is important that we congratulate local councils for doing this because it bolsters their confidence in their decision to fly the flag, particularly in the face of threats and intimidation from fringe groups.

We are a government that has a proud record of rejecting this nasty hate and division. We are a government that strives to build respect, inclusion and unity for all Victorians. This initiative is the result of the hard work of the Rainbow Local Government campaign. Launched in August 2020, the campaign encouraged LGBTIQA+ Victorians to stand for council elections and also identified council candidates that are proud to publicly stand for rights, safety, inclusion and diversity. Council candidates were encouraged to take the rainbow pledge. Nearly half the candidates in the 2020 council elections made this pledge, and I strongly urge all candidates to make this pledge in the lead-up to the 2024 local government elections.

Now, those opposite can hold inquiries into core council services, which is blatant dog whistling to the anti-diversity ideology of those extremist fringe groups, to block social programs which support and uplift our LGBTI communities – albeit it is aided and abetted by their friends the Greens. I would like to say to prospective councillors: do not be like those opposite and their allies in the upper house who are riven with division and beholden to those with extremely hateful views. You will be rejected by your communities just in the same way that Victorians are rejecting the Liberal Party.

Cost of living

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:22): My question is to the Treasurer. Right now people are struggling with the skyrocketing cost of living, which is pushing many to the margins and into poverty. Yet at the same time corporations like the big banks are posting record multibillion-dollar profits. So I ask the Treasurer: instead of an austerity budget that cuts funding and sacks public sector workers, will the government instead make the profiteering corporations pay their fair share of tax in order to fund what is required to help people in need?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:23): I thank the member for Pahran for his question, and of course I would have to start my response by saying I will not pre-empt what is in the budget. We will have to wait for budget day to see what is in the budget. Certainly as a government we recognise that many Victorians are doing it tough. We have got rising interest rates and we have got high inflation – coming down off a high – and that has caused pressure on families.

As a government our values have been lived large through the priorities we have set and the decisions we have made. We will live those priorities both in terms of the things that we do in the upcoming budget and as a government, because those are our values. Importantly, we recognise that it is vitally important that as a community we make further and more investment in the things that secure the future for Victorians, and we will continue to do that. Our Labor financial statement outlined our four-year strategy, a strategy that was directed to ensuring that Victorians got the just deserts of a government that was focused on their welfare and wellbeing, and we will continue to do that.

Might I also say that we promised those things to the people of Victoria and we will deliver them, because we do what matters and we ensure that the things that Victorians voted for are respected and delivered. As a government, if you want to know where our values are and what our budget might look like, of course I cannot tell you what is in the budget, but we will live our values large and we will look after those in the community who essentially need the continued support and assistance of the state.

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:25): On a supplementary question to the Treasurer, the Treasurer in his answer has referred to Labor's financial statement, which was released two days before the election, and in releasing that statement he said that their election commitments were fully funded and fully costed. The Treasurer went on to say:

Matthew Guy's Liberals' plan for cuts and closures would not only hurt Victorians' jobs and livelihoods – it would put our state's entire economic recovery at risk.

Given the government was so opposed to cuts prior to the election, will they now honour this commitment and rule out an austerity budget, with no cuts to funding and no cuts to public sector jobs?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:26): I thank the member for his supplementary question. I make the point that we indicated in Labor's financial statement that we would deliver all of the things that we promised to the people of Victoria, and we absolutely will deliver on them. Might I also say that in Labor's financial statement we continued the consistent approach that this government adopts to make sure that efficiencies are delivered. If you look through that statement, you will see line item after line item looking at how we can make the delivery of government more efficient for Victorians. But let me also say this government's track record has always been about growing the services that Victorians need and value and, up until of course the pandemic, delivering the highest average surpluses the state of Victoria has ever seen. We are a government that is committed to making sure that Victorians get value for money. We will continue to do that and continue to run efficient services.

Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ support

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:27): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government proudly stands in solidarity with all members of the LGBTIQ+, including our healthcare workers. Every single LGBTIQ+ Victorian should know that they are welcome, supported and loved for being exactly who they are. We mark IDAHOBIT on 17 May to recognise the anniversary of the World Health Organization removing homosexuality from its classification of diseases.

Health care certainly has come a long way in the past 32 years. There would be no health system without its dedicated workforce, and today I recognise the contribution of Victoria's LGBTIQ+ healthcare workers. These are our nurses, our doctors, our pharmacists, our cooks, our cleaners, the allied health professionals as well as our administrative staff. Your hard work is valued. Your diverse experiences make you better at your job, and you strengthen our healthcare system.

This government wants everyone to know that they can always bring their whole selves to work. In Victoria equality is not negotiable, and we know our healthcare workers live this value every day. I am particularly proud that the Department of Health holds the title of Pride Network of the Year. Classifying homosexuality as a disease cast a long shadow that we still live with today. It bred hate, fear and discrimination. In some places this still goes on. Unlike those opposite, we unequivocally condemn transphobia. When will the member for Hawthorn stand up in this place and do exactly the same?

Federal roads funding

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:29): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Last week's federal budget ripped \$1.3 billion from Victoria's road funding to June 2024. Why has the minister failed to secure Victoria's fair share of road funding?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:29): I thank the member for his question. Can I say from the outset that it is terrific to have a partner in Canberra that acts in true partnership with the Victorian state government, because unlike those on the other side – we never got these questions when it was their mates in Canberra. We never got those questions with the former leader of the federal National Party, who oversaw possibly the worst mismanaged project, the inland rail project, in federation. We never got those questions then, but we are getting those questions now. I do welcome the federal government having a nearly \$100 million increase in Victoria's share of transport infrastructure funding in last week's budget. We are working in partnership with them to be able to deliver a number of projects, because partnerships are what it is all about, whether it is working with local governments on improving roads or whether it is working with the federal government on improving roads.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on a question of relevance, the minister is speaking about trains and everything else except roads and the \$1.3 billion cut.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Melissa HORNE: I think the thing that we need to keep in mind is that the federal government has got a 90-day review into many of the infrastructure projects, which do include roads. We will continue to work with them, because unlike those on the other side that are happy to issue press releases –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Gippsland South, you asked a question; I expect you want to hear the answer. Those on my left will come to order.

Melissa HORNE: As I was saying, we will continue to work with the federal government, and I do welcome the federal government's continued investment in, particularly, supporting roads through

local councils, including the \$100 million Roads to Recovery program and the \$72 million Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for South Barwon, you are warned.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:32): Victoria's share of federal road funding is about half that of both New South Wales and Queensland –

Jacinta Allan interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Do you want to talk about Princes Highway East? Three years after –

The SPEAKER: Member for Gippsland South and the Deputy Premier! The member for Gippsland South, without assistance.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Speaker. Victoria's share of federal road funding is about half that of both New South Wales and Queensland. This is due to a lack of matching funds from the Andrews Labor government. Why has the minister failed to convince the Victorian Treasurer of the need for matching funds to fix Victoria's roads?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:33): I think the member needs to cool his jets and wait for the Treasurer to hand down the budget next week. We will continue to work with the federal government in partnership to be able to continually improve roads across Victoria.

Ministers statements: LGBTIQ+ support

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:34): Today and every day every member of our LGBTIQ+ community should feel valued, safe, respected and that who they are is enough – no more, no less. Today is an important day for all of us to come together and call out appalling behaviour, bigotry, hatred and some of the nastiest stuff we have seen for a very long time. It is not just about libraries, it is not just about events at council, although we do send our best wishes to council staff and of course performers and others who wanted to be part of those events – lawful events, fun events, events that are not compulsory. If you do not want to go, then you do not have to, but what you ought not be doing is standing in the way of other people expressing their support for diversity, their support for equality and their support for a fair and reasonable state.

What is more, it is not just about those issues. We saw in last year's election campaign the rise of many extremists, people with views that on any measure are not in keeping with mainstream values in this, the progressive capital of our nation. We called it out at the time. Not everybody necessarily agreed and supported that view. What has become clear since is that there are some – not leaders, but those who pretend to be leaders – who are in a political partnership, a preference swap and who knows what else on policy and all manner of other detail with people whose views are not in keeping with mainstream values and indeed not in keeping with the law of this state. Violence is wrong. Hatred hurts. It hurts people, it costs lives and it changes lives – and not for the better. No-one on this side the house, no-one in this government, is in a political partnership with those sorts of Victorians. I am not sure if the Leader of the Opposition can say the same.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, I have several unanswered questions once again. Question 113 for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety was due on 23 March 2023. I also have question 209 for the Minister for Planning, due on 7 April 2023; question 70 for the Minister for Housing, due on 8 April 2023; and question 90 for the Minister for Housing, due on 21 April 2023. I would be most grateful if my constituents would have the attention of the ministers in answering those questions, please.

The SPEAKER: Those questions will be followed up.

Constituency questions

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:37): (150) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Will the minister provide design plans and a time frame for the completion of repair works on the O'Shannassy aqueduct trail bridge in the Upper Yarra? This key piece of tourism infrastructure has been closed for well over two years. Parks Victoria have been undertaking design plans since 2022. The Parks Victoria website states that works to provide continued access to the trail are expected to be completed in 2023. No other information is supplied, and locals are questioning when and if this bridge repair will actually occur. As a result of the closure, trail users have been seen scrambling down the slope and up the other side and interfering with the cyclone fencing. This is pretty difficult with a bike. I inspected the site firsthand a couple of times and could easily see the track marks. It is steep, muddy, wet and dangerous if someone was to slip and fall. The bridge must be repaired as soon as possible.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:38): (151) My question is to the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep in the other place. How much investment has the Victorian government made in building and upgrading early childhood facilities in Tarneit since 2014? As kinder enrolments for 2024 open, it has been great to visit the amazing facilities around my electorate of Tarneit. I was delighted to be joined by Minister Stitt last week in visiting Mossfiel Children's Centre to meet the educators, staff and of course the amazing children. Free kinder has had a huge impact on my communities of Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing, saving families up to \$2500 dollars per child per year. I am proud to be part of a government that has been putting money back into the pockets of families while making sure that they have access to the best quality services in the nation.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:39): (152) My constituency question is for the Minister for Youth Justice. My question is: will the minister visit Mildura and meet with Hands Up Mallee, Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Mildura City Heart and Victoria Police to discuss possible solutions, such as the establishment of a youth commissioner program, to break the cycle of youth crime in my electorate? Recent data shows that youth crime in Mildura has increased to the tune of 12 per cent, and it is being felt not only by retailers in the CBD, Mildura's city heart, but retailers on a broader level, because we are quite spread out. But also my office has been contacted by community members who are really concerned about safety in their own homes. The government should be looking at a preventative and educational program or system that breaks the cycle before our youth commit the crime or become antisocial on the street. The work needs to be done collectively, because it is one of those things that not one agency looks after, and things are falling through the cracks.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:40): (153) I have a question for the Minister for Health. I have received many inquiries from parents regarding details about the school dental program, which ensures that children get good dental care and also saves families money in these difficult times. Can the minister give me information about the timetable of visits to schools in the Thomastown electorate?

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (14:41): (154) My question is to the Minister for Education. Mornington Park Primary School is located in a small pocket of Mornington called Mornington Park, originally called the Tanti Park estate, a presently and historically disadvantaged area of my electorate. When children begin primary school there, their average language and literacy skills are often low compared with other schools, and many of the students have learning difficulties. Principal Bev Dadds

and the school do a great job, though, bringing kids up. But these students are very disadvantaged by inadequate infrastructure and decades-old facilities at the school, unaccommodating to the students' unique academic, emotional and physical needs. The school needs new buildings with breakout rooms for paediatricians, speech therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists; removal of all asbestos in the school, particularly block B, which is all asbestos; and upgraded toilets, many smelly and asbestos ridden. Minister, when will this government deliver Mornington Park Primary School's much-needed upgrades and provide a modern, inclusive and safe school to already underprivileged students?

Hastings electorate

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (14:42): (155) My question is for the Minister for Small Business. Minister, this week, 15 to 21 May, is Australian Made Week. Australian Made Week is an opportunity to showcase the fantastic small businesses in our state and across Australia. I note that 98 per cent of all businesses in Victoria are small businesses, and four out of five shoppers believe that buying Australian made is important. In my electorate of Hastings we have some amazing small businesses creating Australian-made local products. These range from Hey Laidy, a small business that creates limited edition handcrafted guitar, camera and bag straps in Tyabb, to Ript Furniture, a small family business that hand builds timber dog crates, buffet units and other furniture at Langwarrin. The Small Business Bus recently visited Hastings as well. Other than the Small Business Bus, can the minister advise how businesses in my electorate can get further support through Business Victoria for their business needs so that we can continue to support and shop local?

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:43): (156) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Yarra council's public open space contribution has been sitting on the minister's desk for almost a year now. This amendment, supported by the community and an independent panel, makes developers pay 7.4 per cent of the value of their land towards open space in our cities, benefiting residents and addressing the scarcity of open space in our rapidly densifying suburbs. Considering the rigorous community consultation, the months of work, the many benefits and the urgent need, members of my community who have faithfully contributed to this process have come to me asking, 'Why has the government not signed off on this overdue amendment?' Their fear is that the government's cosy relationship with property developers is the reason. I ask for the minister to sign off on all overdue planning scheme amendments from the City of Yarra. All it takes is a stroke of the pen.

Yan Yean electorate

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (14:44): (157) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The rainy season has started, and we know that with increased rain comes the need for intensified maintenance on our roads to quickly address any damage that may be caused. Safe roads are well-maintained roads. The last road maintenance blitz was well received by the residents of Yan Yean, where we have many stretches of rural roads. How will the government work to keep our roads in good condition during the current rainy season?

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:44): (158) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Residents in Nar Nar Goon, Maryknoll, Tynong, Garfield and Bunyip want to know when action will finally be taken on the Princes Highway between Nar Nar Goon and Bunyip to upgrade these dangerous intersections. Last week the federal Labor budget did nothing to improve our road infrastructure in West Gippsland, and these residents are now worried that projects will continue to be ignored, putting lives at risk. Heavy vehicle traffic is increasing in the area, with trucks taking material from local mines and quarries to Melbourne for the government's Big Build, and it is destroying our local roads in the process. So my question to the minister is: with a federal Labor government now in Canberra and a state Labor government on Spring Street, what is the excuse for not funding these projects to protect road users in my community?

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:45): (159) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Minister, how many vouchers have been distributed to local shoppers in Ringwood East through the Stamp Me app to date? Work is heating up in Ringwood and Ringwood East as we prepare to remove the dangerous and congested level crossings at Bedford Road and at Dublin Road. Once completed in 2025, the entire Ringwood electorate will be level crossing free, slashing congestion and creating new open spaces with the completion of the Heathmont rail trail and the Ringwood East village plaza. It is certainly welcome news for my community, which endorsed these level crossing removals resoundingly at the last election. The Level Crossing Removal Project team have rolled out the Stamp Me app to local traders while we get the work done. For every \$10 spent at local stores, shoppers receive one stamp, and after nine stamps, customers are rewarded with a \$10 voucher to use at their local shops. It is injecting funds into local small businesses and rewarding loyal local shoppers for their support during these very important works.

Rulings from the Chair**Constituency questions**

The SPEAKER (14:46): Order! Before we move to the motion before the house, yesterday the member for Caulfield raised a constituency question in relation to roads for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The member for Caulfield did not ask a question. I therefore rule the constituency question he raised out of order.

Motions**Safe Schools****Debate resumed.**

Vicki WARD (Eltham) (14:47): I will return to my debate. Before we stopped for lunch, I was talking about the amazing activities that were happening in my community this morning. It was just phenomenal to see how many amazing people came to Eltham Library and celebrated their diversity and celebrated love and respect. I really want to do a big shout-out to my librarians, who have done the most phenomenal job in my community. I want to thank those librarians for the work that they did during the pandemic, during lockdowns, when they were out delivering books personally to people's homes and when they were checking in on vulnerable people. They knew they were vulnerable, because they spent time in the library. Now these incredibly kind, professional people have been targeted by people who are absolutely hideous. They have been threatened with violence by people coming into the library as well as people outside, people in emails, people on the phone and people of course online – because, as we know, there is no bigger coward than a keyboard warrior. I also want to thank Victoria Police for coming out to my community and having a really strong presence this morning, showing that this kind of dangerous, aggressive and bigoted behaviour is just not acceptable.

As with all of us, I go around to a number of our local schools, and as the Parliamentary Secretary for Education, I do spend time in a number of schools. I can tell you how heartbreaking it was to have a kid come up to me – a kid that I had met when they were in grade 6 – and speak to me about the loneliness of feeling like they were the only gay kid at the school. They felt clearly that they were an outlier and that they were an outsider. I know that it is so important with Safe Schools that kids are helped to feel included and that teachers are given the necessary skills and supports to help them support vulnerable kids in their school community, and for this kid to not feel that is just absolutely heartbreaking. I applaud my local schools, as I mentioned earlier, such as Eltham High, that do such fantastic work in supporting our kids and in giving tools to kids and to teachers to help them really give kids the support that they need.

I spoke about my pride in Eltham High School, and it is a phenomenal school. I also want to thank the Minister for Education for the tremendous work that she does, the absolute passion that she has for

inclusion in our schools and the absolute commitment and passion that she has for equality in our schools and how strongly she is pushing this.

We have seen hate and division online surrounding drag story time at Eltham Library and a number of other sites across our state. Whether it has been raising the rainbow flag or having a trivia night at the local library, we have seen a lot of vitriol and we have seen a lot of hatred. Some of this is absolute bigotry, some of it is based in confusion.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about Safe Schools and where the seeds of some of this confusion begin. I am going to go back in time to 2016 and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee when I was a member of PAEC and was at the table. I had the then member for Kew talking about Safe Schools and his concern that Safe Schools was teaching kids unnecessary lessons, that it was a part of the curriculum, that it was influencing kids' behaviour, that it was teaching kids to behave in this way or that way, whereas actually it is a program. The then Minister for Education made this point very clearly: he said that Safe Schools does not teach sexuality education. The Safe Schools program is not and does not replace sexuality education. All government schools are required to deliver age-appropriate sexuality programs. But the former member for Kew continued, and he did this over a number of years where he tried to vilify the Safe Schools program. I went to the member for Kew and I pulled him aside and I said, 'Mate, I am a parent at the pilot school for Safe Schools. I know what this school looks like. What you're saying is happening in classrooms is not happening – it is my lived experience. What you're saying my kids are not experiencing, my kids are not seeing, because my kids didn't need that support.' It is that confusion, whether it is deliberate or not, that really helps fan the flames of this extreme division, anger and aggression that we are seeing.

Safe Schools is about protecting kids, and it is about protecting kids from exactly the kind of behaviour that we have seen targeted at Eltham Library, that we have seen targeted at Monash council, that we have seen targeted at Banyule council for flying an LGBTIQ+ flag, that we have seen targeted at Lalor for daring to have a queer trivia night, that we have seen targeted across the state. We have even seen schools targeted for having drag story time. We have seen so much unpleasant, unwarranted behaviour that is hurtful and that is damaging. It does incredible damage to our kids. This kind of behaviour hurts our kids more than it hurts anyone. We know that rainbow kids are the ones who are most vulnerable to self-harm and that they have terribly difficult problems with mental health when they are not accepted, when they are made to feel that they do not belong. When we see this hideous behaviour – it is appalling as to how it can affect our kids. It is just shocking.

I want to talk about a couple of emails that I have received from people telling me that they do not feel safe in my community because of what they have seen happen around Eltham Library. And they are adults – they are adults who do not feel safe because of this behaviour. How do the kids feel? How do the kids feel that, for example, in Eltham we had someone drive all the way from Canberra to wave a sign saying how outrageous it was that we had an IDAHOBIT event at Eltham Library today. There is so much vitriol and hatred in these few people – how does this make these vulnerable kids feel? It is appalling, it is unconscionable that they would treat kids in this way, that they would use our vulnerable community for collateral damage. Who knows what it is they are actually trying to achieve? But what we do know that they are achieving is pain. But what we also know they are achieving is community solidarity, and there is no community more solid than mine.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:54): I rise to make some comments on the motion before the house today:

That this house affirms its support for the Safe Schools program and acknowledges that it critically:

- (1) supports the well-being of all young people; and
- (2) provides valuable resources and support for teachers to foster an inclusive learning environment where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I think we would all agree that every single child should feel safe. It is the right of every child to feel safe and there is an obligation on all of us to provide a safe environment for these kids.

Today is IDAHOBIT, which is a day against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and it is appropriate for us to be talking about this as part of the very important element of what many of our young children, particularly those from an LGBTIQ+ background, experience at school and what we need to do to ensure that they have a safe environment. Can I say to every LGBTIQ+ Victorian: you are worthy, you are accepted, you are loved, and you and your kids deserve nothing less than to be embraced by all, including the schools, teachers, friends and communities. We must embrace, support and provide every single opportunity for every child no matter who they are, no matter where they come from and no matter what background they are also from. That extends more broadly to both their ethnic background and their faith, and it is something that I have raised on many occasions, as you know, Speaker, particularly in my community where we have unfortunately an increase in antisemitism and we have seen kids targeted at schools because of their faith background as well.

On this motion I wanted at the outset to just raise a few people in terms of their being staunch advocates in this space, particularly Michael Barnett from Aleph. Michael has been a staunch supporter and has been able to work with and support many of the schools. Very early on he worked with Bialik College and King David, just to name a few, and Mount Scopus has been involved in that, in terms of Jewish schools, but we also have a number of other schools that have been involved in terms of being able to provide a safe environment. There is no question that non-heterosexual Australians experience anxiety at 2½ times the rate of heterosexual people. For depression, the figure is four times the rate of heterosexual people. One in six LGBTIQ+ people have attempted suicide and one-third have harmed themselves. They are alarming figures and say that we must do more to support those who do not feel that they belong and those who feel that it is tough just to be able to get on with their daily lives. We have seen that in many instances. We have seen with organisations like Beyond Blue that 61 per cent of young non-heterosexual people have reported experiencing verbal abuse and 80 per cent have reported physical abuse. We have seen another study that showed 33 per cent of trans people reported discrimination in employment as a result of being trans and the unemployment rate of 19 per cent was more than three times that of the national rate.

We have a great state. Victoria is a state that should be embracing everybody no matter who you are, no matter where you come from. We should not be using politics as a way to fight against things like this. We should be coming together and working in ways to actually help people. I have got to say that certainly during question time today I did not feel that that was doing anything to help anybody, particularly those from the LGBTIQ+ community. I know many from our party, the Liberal Party, the Pride branch which is the fastest growing branch in our Liberal Party, of which I am proud to be a member, would feel pretty alarmed about the way that Labor members attacked the Liberal Party today because that does nothing. That does nothing to try and help people belong. The LGBTIQ+ community should not be used as a political football. We should not be using people and targeting them in that way. We should be talking across the chamber about how we do more. We should absolutely do that.

I am very proud that the Leader of the Opposition the member for Hawthorn, the Manager of Opposition Business the member for Brighton, the leader in the upper house Georgie Crozier and a number of others went to the Pride March not only on this occasion but on a number of occasions and stood side by side with the LGBTIQ+ community. We will continue to do so, whether it is popular or whether it is not popular. We will do it because we care, and we will do it because we do not want this to be seen as a political football. So I say, and I implore those opposite: let us look at how we can work together. Let us look at how we can come together on these things.

Belinda Wilson interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Well, again I say – and I am trying to do this as calmly and as fairly as I possibly can – that ultimately this is not something that we should be trying to score cheap political points out of. It is something that we should be working together on. And that is where I very proudly stand alongside many of those within my party, as I said, including the Liberal Pride branch, who have been absolutely actively providing a very inclusive part of our party so people can feel welcome and

so people can feel supported. And if those opposite did not hear me the first time, it is the fastest growing branch we have within our party. So it is certainly something that we celebrate.

Can I also just move on to some of the schools, particularly, that I want to make mention of today, which do some great work. Unfortunately, only a week or so ago we had a report that our great school, Glen Eira College, had what was labelled a toxic and bullying situation where there were almost 10 social media bullying pages on TikTok and Instagram with students posting –

A member interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Excuse me – posting cruel memes mocking other students and teachers before flashing identifiable photographs of their targets. Can I say the school takes these things very seriously, and I rang the principal as soon as I was made aware of this and was comforted to know that they were acting immediately on this to ensure that kids feel safe – immediately – and so they should. Looking at Glen Eira College's *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy*, one of the things that I think is very important is, within this policy, it talks about all kids feeling safe, whether they be from different backgrounds, whether they be students with disabilities or whether they be from the LGBTIQ+ background. It says this, and I note:

Every person involved in our school has an important role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

That is where we need to be. It is something that we all need to work together on. Whether you are at the school, whether you are a parent at the school or whether you are part of the broader school community, everyone needs to work together to ensure that they feel safe. If you see something wrong, you need to tell somebody. We certainly saw that in a number of inquiries that we had here in this Parliament. We led the way in terms of that in the child safety area, particularly in the child abuse work that was done here in this Parliament, and I think that is something that we must continue to do to ensure that we have kids that feel safe.

At the moment we have issues that are still before the courts. I will not make comment on specific details regarding Brighton Secondary College, but it was absolutely appalling that we had a number of kids that were targeted – a number of kids that saw over that time, because they have Jewish backgrounds, antisemitic attacks. The government has spent literally millions of dollars of taxpayers money trying to defend the school, and these poor kids have again had to endure a horrific time at the school. It has been appalling the way those kids have been treated, and I hope that the government ensures that there are systems in place and that kids of all backgrounds are safe, because that is what kids need and expect.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (15:04): I am most pleased to make a contribution today on this motion that this house affirms our support for Safe Schools and acknowledges that the program supports the wellbeing of young people and provides valuable resources and support for teachers to foster an inclusive learning environment.

I do not doubt the sincerity of some members opposite when they say that they support this program, and I do not doubt the sincerity of some members opposite when they say that looking after LGBTIQ+ Victorians is important. I do not. But they cannot continue to deny that they sit in a party room with people who hold views on these matters that are absolutely repugnant. You cannot pretend on one hand that you are all for equality and then pretend that in 2018 you did not take a policy to the election that was about scrapping Safe Schools. It is not a matter of debate, it is a matter of bare fact that those opposite took a policy to the 2018 election – whilst they were busily beating up on fictional African gangs – to scrap Safe Schools. Some of the language they used at the time was outrageous. Someone said:

Programs like Safe Schools ... impose a politically correct gender and sexuality agenda on schools.

That was T Smith, former member for Kew. I am glad he is 'former'. But that is a former member. There was a teacher who as recently as 2017 said that the department who were the makers of Safe Schools had:

... clearly used it as a ruse to sneak erotic sexualised content that has nothing to do with bullying into the classroom.

What a load of tripe! I am delighted that the author of that comment is no longer a teacher. I am concerned, though, that she is a member of the other place. It is absolutely incredible that these people continue to be preselected by those opposite. These views may very well be anathema to the member for Brighton, the member for Narracan or others on that side of the chamber, but the reality is they cannot pretend that they are not sitting in their party room – these bigots, these people who want to fan the flames of hate every single day, these people who want to beat up on trans kids like it is a hobby.

It is extraordinary to me that anyone with a personal tweeting history of, say, 200 or 300 tweets would have 95 or 98 per cent of those tweets about one topic; it would not matter what the topic was. If it was about *Star Wars*, I would reckon you were a bit weird. If it was about soccer, I would reckon you were a bit weird. But stuff me if Mrs Deeming does not have 300-odd tweets all about trans kids. She is obsessed, and it is weird and it is offensive, and beating up on trans kids is not something that anyone should be tolerating on that side. And yet 11 out of 30 said, 'We should stick with her.' Well, shame on them, because if you keep these people in your party room, it is not just the standard you are walking past, it is the standard you are holding hands with.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, numerous speakers have strayed somewhat from the motion, and that is completely understandable. Would the member please return to the motion, because casting aspersions across parts of the entire chamber is offensive. I would ask you to bring the member back to the motion.

Will FOWLES: I thank the member for Brighton for his efforts in this regard, but it absolutely remains the case that I am not a member of a political party that has members who have these views in it. I am not. And there is a goodly chunk of those –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng HeangTak): Member for Ringwood, can I just rule on the point of order. It has been a wideranging debate, but I ask the member for Ringwood to come back to the motion.

Will FOWLES: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. I am not a member of a party that considers it okay for these people to be in my party, and I talk about the party more generally. The reality is she might no longer be part of the parliamentary Liberal Party, but she is a part of the Liberal Party. She is still a member, and if you ask the president, he says there is no move afoot to boot her out. What that is saying is that the Liberal Party accepts as a premise that those views are fine within their particular world view. And I say no. It should not be fine. It should not be even close to fine. To hold views like saying that the Department of Education is trying to sneak erotic sexualised content into the classroom – I mean, what a load of nonsense. Apart from the fact that it defies a bare factual reading, it speaks to a really significant, deeply held crusade against being welcoming and respectful and putting our arms around a community that in many respects does it really tough.

We know how over-represented trans kids are in all of the mental health stats; we know that. That is a big part of the reason why the Victorian Labor government is putting so much investment into health services, particularly for trans youth but LGBTIQ youth more generally. These are really, really important issues, and when people like that person stand out the front and beat up on trans kids, with their acolytes, they do enormous damage – enormous damage to those kids and to their families. I appreciate that not everyone on that side of the chamber shares her views. I do not pretend that it is the case that they all share that viewpoint. But they are prepared to share a party membership with her and they are prepared – many of them – to share a party room with her. Well, you just cannot be an alternative government and consider that these fringe, mad, right-wing views are an appropriate way to be an alternative government.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, you ruled a couple of minutes ago. I suggest that perhaps the member has defied your ruling, and I would ask you to ask the member to return back

to the question. I appreciate it is a wideranging debate, but it should be done respectfully. I think that people in this chamber universally agree with the sentiments that are being expressed by all of the members in this place, and I think respectful and mature members would recognise that.

Sarah Connolly: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is being entirely relevant to the motion before the house. He is reflecting on comments and actions and behaviours of members of those opposite, including in the other chamber, that go to the very heart of exactly the reason why we need the Safe Schools program in every school in the first place. He is being entirely relevant to the motion at hand.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng HeangTak): I think it is a point of debate.

Will FOWLES: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. Look, I have sought to highlight in my contribution today that there is clearly a diversity of viewpoints in that lot over there but there is an absolute unity of view and purpose when it comes to these issues from Labor. Because only Labor when we say equality is not negotiable actually deliver on that every single day in government. Only Labor is prepared to stand up and say unequivocally – every single member of the Labor caucus in this place will stand up and say – that we love members of this community, that we respect them, that we get our arms around them and that we want to support them. That cannot be said of every other group in this Parliament, in this chamber or in the other place, and it is critical for Victorians to understand on this day, IDAHOBIT, the day against homophobia and transphobia and intersex discrimination and biphobia – more than any other day – that we stand with these communities, shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, and we will stare down the hate. They cannot win. They cannot be allowed to win. These people are only about hate. They are only about division. Those who seek to disrupt the lawful activities, the inclusive activities, whether it is drag story time or whether it is a normal council meeting or whether it is any other event, ought be stopped dead in their tracks because they are not behaving like Australians and they are not behaving like Victorians. They are doing nothing to assist our society becoming stronger and better and more diverse, because diversity is very, very much our strength. I absolutely support the motion before the chamber.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:15): I rise to speak on the motion, which ostensibly is a motion about love and a motion about supporting children to be loved no matter who they are. I am certain that all members in this place want all children to be loved – I am certain of that – and that is a good thing. There have been circumstances where people have said and done things which are inappropriate, and they have said and done things which are worse than inappropriate. Not everybody in every society, unfortunately, values love, values equality and values inclusivity as perhaps everybody in this chamber does. Therefore I think it is incumbent upon all of us to do whatever we can to make sure that everybody in our communities is brought on that journey to ensure that that happens. I have made a commitment, both as a shadow minister and before that as a backbencher, to do exactly that.

There have been times when this place has dealt with difficult issues or parties have dealt with difficult issues or difficult issues have arisen because of external events, and I have tried in every circumstance to talk about what I view as right and to live up to my commitment to my community in calling out behaviour of that nature no matter who it is. One of the points I have made over and over again is that some have put it that freedom of speech gives you the right to have your view whether or not it is bigoted. Firstly, I am not sure I agree with that, but that view has been put forward. But I also believe that it is my right and my freedom of speech to call someone a bigot in return. If someone wants to use their freedom of speech to use words and express sentiments that undermine another person and undermine the way they feel loved, the way they feel equal or the way they feel cared for and respected, I feel that I have a right to call that out.

I would say to the Premier in relation to these issues that one of the things that our Parliament can do on both sides of the chamber is understand that the best way to achieve a Victoria we want is to ensure that we all work together to do that, and that means making sure that we do not play political games. If behaviour deserves to be called out, it should be called out, and the Premier would be perfectly

entitled to do that. But I think we can all do better to ensure that partisanship does not occur. I do not want to dwell on it, but this morning I was made aware of an event in the Parliament in relation to the celebration of today, and unlike every other event that occurs in this place, not all members were invited. The first thing I did is I went personally into the Premier's office and asked for details of that event. I asked for details of the location and the time, and I was not provided with them. I still have not been provided with those details. It was the first thing that I did as the shadow minister, and I can say the minister did not provide those to me as the shadow either. I can assure you I would have been the first person into that event and would have joined that event had I known about it, and I am sure that everybody in this place would know that to be true.

I heard the Premier today talking about behaviour and preferences in his final contribution. I did not make the point, because I was just returning to the chamber after being unfairly removed on a previous day; I am sure, as the Speaker is not here, the Speaker would give me that little bit of latitude in describing it as such. But I would say in return to that – and I heard the points that he made – when you are concerned about the behaviour of a person and believe it needs to be called out, you also need to not accept their vote when they vote with you in the Parliament. In the federal Parliament I managed the house for the Liberal Party when a member crossed to the crossbench and his behaviour was totally unacceptable. In fact there was more than one, but one person's behaviour was totally unacceptable – totally and utterly unacceptable. I am not in any way reflecting on the party, but the decision was taken by the coalition to not accept that person's vote and to immediately pair every time that person voted with our party. I hear the Premier's comments, but I now put it to the Premier directly and say, 'Are you going to accept that person's vote every time in the upper house? Because if you have the courage of your convictions, you will set aside their vote, as the precedent was set previously.'

I am going to get in trouble for saying this, I am sure. I do not want people with those views in my party, and it is a very difficult discussion to have. It is a very difficult discussion, because one person is not the majority. In a democratic party everybody has a right and there are processes et cetera, et cetera. But I have called out behaviour every single time that it has occurred, and I will keep doing it. I did not have to make that point but I have made that point. But just as I have made that point, I would say to the Premier, 'Why don't we draw a line in the sand? Why don't we now draw a line in the sand and say, "If we do not support the behaviour of certain people, why don't we consider how we behave in the other place – how we behave in relation to that member?"' And I call on the Premier, who I trust is listening, to consider that over coming deliberations in the other place.

But as I say and began by saying, this motion is about love. This motion is about love. It is about inclusivity. It is about respect. And we have a challenge like we do with many other challenges in ensuring that the state becomes the best place it can be, because its best days are in front of us. That means there will be challenges and that we as a state can all help people learn. We can help people do better. We can help people be more inclusive. We can absolutely do that, but it means that we need to do that together. We need to do that as a Parliament, and we need to show leadership in doing that.

One of the ways that you can achieve that best – and it is a point that I have made to the Premier before – is by being magnanimous. It is something unfortunately that we do not see from the Premier. To bring a whole community with you, you need to accept the allies wherever they are and you need to partner with them. You need to ensure that you build a consensus that can talk to different parts of the community, because all of us represent different parts of the community and all of us have a role in talking and working with different parts of the community, and that is actually a good thing. It is actually a strength, and it is one of the differences that I certainly see between the two parliaments over a long period of time.

In this place we could all do more to work together on these important issues. We all could do more on these important issues to ensure that as a Parliament we do what we should be doing for children, which this motion goes to, to ensure that they are loved and they feel loved, so that when a child is questioning who they are, as the member for Eltham spoke to so eloquently before, that child does not feel lonely and unloved, they know that they are and they automatically know that they are. The best

way to do that is for us all to work together and not play politics, and I would call on the Premier to work with us in doing that.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:24): Every day, but especially on 17 May, IDAHOBIT, the international day against LGBTQI+ discrimination, we stand with LGBTQI+ Victorians. Equality, inclusivity and safety are not negotiable in Victoria. IDAHOBIT is the anniversary of 17 May 1990 – you might wonder why I am reiterating this point, and I will come to that – when the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the classification of diseases. We celebrate and remember these advancements towards LGBTQI+ equality. Just thinking about that, homosexuality being under the classification of diseases, with today's perception of these matters it is horrifying to think it was ever classified as a disease. How did it ever come to that? On that note I will say we can truly celebrate how far we have come, noting that there are many barriers still in place and many issues that have to be surmounted. But I do want to celebrate that progression and that acknowledgement, and I think IDAHOBIT is the perfect way to do that, noting of course that we should be respecting and honouring all people in our community every day, regardless of their sexuality or otherwise.

A further point I want to make about that is that it is one thing to talk about these matters and to use terms such as 'inclusivity' et cetera; it is another thing to actually implement real change. Further to that point, it is one thing to talk about it in a context, but another to then change the image in another context or with another social media outlet or another form of media to various different audiences, when in fact what we are really striving for is to be consistent everywhere.

I just want to pick up on a point made by the member for Brighton – and I may have misunderstood a part of his discussion, noting there were many sensitive and respectful elements to his discussion; I do want to pay respect to that – just to say that when it comes to the Premier on matters of equality, no-one can question his absolute conviction, consistency and integrity on this issue. I mean, seriously, in any context throughout time, he has always been consistent on this issue. I just think one needs to take a little bit of care when there are questions raised with regard to his integrity on matters of equality – unequivocal. Of course that flows down to our party. We are as a party very much unified and consistent on this issue. I completely agree that the last thing we want to do is play politics, hence the premise of Safe Schools is all about very constructive, evidence-based programs that are literally helping, no doubt, to save lives and to prevent bullying and harassment into the future, or at a minimum, to surmount these kinds of horrible occurrences that can take place in our schools. At a very minimum it will help all Victorian students to feel safe in their schools.

One little caveat I do want to put in this discussion is that for those opposite to be saying 'Oh, don't play politics, because we have this sterling record in this place' – we all know that is not true. Whilst there are many, I have no doubt, of those opposite who are seeking to reinforce equality and to be very supportive in that space – and I do not deny or in any way diminish their conviction on that matter – it has been extremely confusing. There are any number of signals and positions that have been projected by a number of members of the opposition, consistently even to this day, to the extent that one has to go to a newspaper to check who voted to support a certain person with these views and who voted against them so we know who is supporting one position and who is supporting another. If that is confusing for us, what does that mean for the community as well?

However, if we could be absolutely certain that those opposite were truly united on this issue, the confusion would melt away and, with that, so would these elements of party politics et cetera. So I think one has to be careful when saying, 'Don't play party politics.' It can be manipulative to say, 'Nothing to see here; don't look at history. We are crystal clear on this issue', when we all know that is not true. You have the right to say that when you actually have an unequivocal position that is not confusing. I have to say, over the past week I was looking through articles to see who has this position and who has that position – I do not know where they all sit on this. So if I do not know, how can we expect the broader community to know where the members of the opposition sit on this issue?

Having said that, I want to put a further caveat: I have no doubt that there are many opposite who unequivocally would back in and endorse absolute equality in this state, who want to ensure that every Victorian student knows that they are loved and who want to ensure that there are Safe Schools programs and mental health support in our schools. But I think it is a bit rich to query us when we say at a minimum we are confused about their position on this, and secondly, to in any way question the integrity of the Premier on such matters as equality when we know that he has an unequivocal record in terms of his stance on equality. It is that kind of leadership – because that is what we are talking about – that flows down to all Labor members. That is why I am also proud to be part of our government, because this truly reflects our position when it comes to our attitude to all Victorian students and all members of the LGBTQI+ community. We are unequivocal on this; there is no confusion on the matter. I hope that in some way clarifies some of the questions that have been raised by those opposite with regard to our position versus their position.

Let us look at Safe Schools and what it actually means. It is a program for principals, teachers and school communities that provides schools with professional learning for school staff in creating safe and inclusive classrooms; support to prevent and respond to bullying incidents impacting LGBTQI+ students; support to adopt a whole-of-school approach to preventing discrimination, harassment and bullying; support to review school policies and practice to improve inclusion for LGBTQIA+ students; support to develop student-led activities to create positive, inclusive change; consultation, advice and resources to support individual students; and networking and linkages to evidence-based information, resources and local support services.

As you can see, talking about these issues is extremely important. Visibility of these issues is extremely important, hence events such as the Pride March et cetera being all about making sure that members of the LGBTQI+ community are able to be as loud and proud as they want to be and to be accepted just as they are and loved just as they are. It is also just as important to have the whole community backing such events, because this kind of visibility is certainly helpful when on the path to stamping out discrimination, bigotry, harassment and the like in our community – hence it is no wonder it is an incrementally very popular event in our community. On that note, I just would like to conclude by saying that all Victorian students, in fact all Victorians, should know they are loved.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:34): I rise to speak on the motion. I want to focus mainly on the government purporting to support the wellbeing of all young people and to provide valuable resources and support for teachers to foster an inclusive learning environment where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. I rise to speak on this because of some really disturbing events that have taken place in South-West Coast. What I would say is that despite the extraordinary effort by the teachers, principals and support staff, all is not well in our schools right across Victoria. I will speak to specific issues that are taking place in South-West Coast, but not for one minute do I think it is specific to South-West Coast.

I have long personal experience with the education system. I have been parenting my own students in the school system for 30 years: my eldest son turns 35 next month, my last child has just finished secondary college and my grandchildren are already at school. I have been on school council. I have always been involved in raising funds – in small communities that is a non-negotiable. I have got a lot of friends in a small community who are teachers, and a lot of the teachers who I am talking to and hearing from have taught my children. My children love their teachers and the teachers love my children; these are capable teachers with decades of experience behind them that I am referring to. And they tell me they are throwing their hands in the air, that they have not got the tools that they need. Despite the efforts of the principals and despite the efforts of the support staff, they really are at their wits' end. They tell me that there is not a way to have the tools they need to put the boundaries around the students that some students need. They say that the kids know that, and as a result some of the behaviours in the classroom are out of control. Their words are, 'We do not know where to go and we are throwing our hands in the air.'

That is not all students, and our schools are fantastic. But I will not shy away from what is happening. There have been at least three incidents of serious assault – I am talking captured on CCTV, I am talking head injuries, I am talking hospitalisation, I am talking reporting to the police. Some of these events are so hideous that the parents have been told not to view the videos of their children. One father said to me that the school is so hamstrung without the ability to do anything about it, that the intervention order that was arranged through the police is unable to take effect in the school and it can only be done if the parties agree. The victim is terrified because the perpetrator is able to taunt and throw in the person's face their power over the other student – these are 13- and 14-year-old kids I am talking about. I want to continually say the parents are pleased with everything the principal is doing and the teacher is doing, but they do not have the ability, because they do not have the tools, to really make a difference.

I wrote to the minister and I implored the minister to understand and to intervene because one student has left and gone to another state – to South Australia, our neighbouring state, not far from our part of the world. Another student is homeschooled, traumatised and cannot re-engage at the school because there was no-one able to walk her between classrooms and she was so terrified of the students that were attacking her violently. I wrote to the minister and this is the response I got:

Schools are supported to ensure appropriate structures and supports are in place to mitigate risk and ensure student ... safety.

I spoke to some support staff about these supports that are in place. The minister said:

Schools in the South-West Coast have access to the Schools Mental Health Fund and Menu ...

The minister told me about that when she spoke to this motion. She said there are 56 programs available on Menu that you can pull up, as a school, to look at what is available. The support staff tell me that none of them are available in the regions; they are all Melbourne-based programs.

The response goes on to refer to the Doctors in Secondary School program. The support staff tell me that the doctors have pulled out and that Headspace has pulled out, and that was over a year ago, because there are not doctors available for this. The minister told me that the schools are supported through the Department of Education's inclusion workforces, which include psychologists, social workers and speech therapists. The support workers tell me that is called the triple-S program – psychologists, social workers and speech therapists. According to a support worker, there is a five-year waiting list in Warrnambool. You usually finish secondary school in that time. We are told by the minister there are behaviour coaches. They said, 'What's that?' The support staff do not know what that is. School nurses – I know a lot of school nurses, and they tell me they are inundated. It is such a disturbing place to work because it is all about the kids' emotional challenges and how terrible the kids are feeling and how much distress is going on. They have got nowhere to refer them to. I have been called many times by school nurses so disturbed. It goes on:

Strategies implemented in South-West Coast schools include behaviour support ...

The answer I got was, 'Not present.' That is the plan in Berry Street. 'Yes,' they said, 'but it is not implemented.' Education model Big Life – they said that is really good for primary schools and not so great for secondary. That was what I was informed. Safety planning – they said, 'Not formalised.' And the list goes on. The minister writes to me and says, 'All is well. Here are all the tools that they've got.' The people at the ground tell me they are not available, and they are not in South-West Coast because we are too far from Melbourne.

Minister, I know in your speech you implored us to understand that you are doing the best you can do. That was what the minister said in her speech. I beg you, Minister, to listen to the teachers and to the principals. They are worried about the students. The students are only expressing their disturbed behaviour because of things like lockdown for two years and there being no tools available for the teachers to be able to put the disciplines in place – the boundaries and the consequences – that need to be there and that children do respond to. It is not an old-fashioned approach. It is an approach that

shows love, care and responsibility. Give the teachers those tools and let us recognise the reality of what is happening. We cannot just pretend that this is not real.

I am so concerned about what I am hearing. When I spoke to a support worker recently she said the kids are talking to each other saying things like ‘Just go and kill yourself’. These are words that she said she is hearing from the students. That is what they are being told, mostly in cyberspace, and she said no-one can do anything. The cyber commissioner is in place, but nothing has ever been acted upon. There is no consequence. We have to, as the adults in the room, recognise the truth of what is really happening.

I am saying this in the context that these teachers are experienced, decent, hardworking, capable people. They need the tools because of course the kids know when they can get away with it. If you have got an intervention order, or whatever you call them these days, on a child and the school is not able to implement it, it is just not working. That is how severe this is. I was shocked to hear we had situations of assault let alone intervention orders in the school. Imagine trying to work out how to organise your school program and having to worry about intervention orders and which students cannot be in the same class as others, because that is not unusual; that is actually fairly usual. I wanted to raise that in the Parliament because I am so concerned that this minister says there is so much available, and I do not know what more I can do. The psychologists are talking to me, the principals are talking to me, the parents are talking to me and the children are feeling like they cannot attend school. The children who are doing these actions are minorities, but they are controlling and destroying the learning environment, and we have to act. We have to give them the guidance they need.

In the last 44 seconds I have got, I will also raise an issue in Nullawarre Primary School, which the principal showed me around last week, where the school buses and the cars all pull up together on an area that needs asphaltting, and the kinder kids who also attend mingle with the schoolkids, mingle with the school buses and mingle with the parents turning up. It is just a really dangerous situation. So with the budget coming up next week I am looking forward to the Nullawarre Primary School getting an allocation of funding so we can asphalt the area, mark it out clearly and put some distance between the children and the buses, because safety should be our priority in schools. I hope the minister lives up to the words that she talks about and puts that front of mind.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:44): I too rise to make a contribution on this motion before the house. It is really a perfect day to be standing here and speaking in support of safe schools, the Safe Schools program and the very important work that that program enables in our schools with the education tools for teaching staff to be able to harness, with today being the very day back in 1990 that the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the classification of diseases. As the member for Albert Park just emphatically stated, it is almost impossible to believe that there existed a time not so long ago that it was thought that being gay – homosexuality – was in fact a disease and something spreading and something that you can catch.

I would like to think that today everyone in this house and out in the broader community would understand that that is not in fact true and never was true. We have certainly moved a long way past the 1990 view of what it was to be gay, homosexual and part of our LGBTIQ community. But I do want to say that today we are going to celebrate and, most importantly, remember the advances towards LGBTIQ equality here in Victoria, in our country and indeed across the world. I know there have been members on the other side that have stood and emphatically talked about their support, on IDAHOBIT, of our LGBTIQ community and how far we have come and how far we have to go. But today on this side of the house we have stood here and talked about how we stand shoulder to shoulder with the community. As we say to all Victorians: equality, inclusivity and safety are not negotiable in Victoria.

I did want to begin my contribution this afternoon by saying that the Andrews Labor government is, always has been and always will be proud to stand with LGBTIQ+ students, teachers and school staff every single day of the year. Many of you would know that I am a very proud western suburbs MP. Some out west have described me as a woman of faith, but I am very much raising my children in the

Catholic faith, and I am very proud to stand here and say that my family and I stand each and every single day with the LGBTIQ+ community.

Now, I was not going to talk about the political hot potato that I saw in the 2018 election and the 2022 election that has just gone. The politicking on a grotesque scale in my community in the western suburbs targeted almost in a predatory manner vulnerable people in my community around Safe Schools. I want to give a couple of examples of that because I know the member for Brighton has stood and talked about how we should not be treating this as a political hot potato, passing it around and arguing about it. We know that not every member here in the Parliament of Victoria has the same views. It can be really great to have differing views, but in some cases it does inflict – and has inflicted – harm and trauma and does not contribute to Victorians being the best people that they can be.

In 2018 I had a gentleman run against me. He did not run for the Liberal or National parties – I will say that on the record – but he did stand beside me to say that he was pretty pleased with the work that Labor was doing in the western suburbs. But there was one thing he could not stand about our party and that was the Safe Schools program. His child did not go to a school that had a Safe Schools program and, I have no doubt, would not go on to a high school that had anything like a Safe Schools program. But I asked him what he thought a Safe Schools program was and why he thought that we had put it into local schools. He said to me that we were encouraging his daughter to be a lesbian, essentially. His daughter I think at the time was in primary school. He had never been to the school curriculum website to have a look at what Safe Schools actually was and to find that it was an education program and a place where teachers could go to access a wide range of tools and information to assist students who identified as LGBTIQ+ in the school and help them feel safe and supported so they could go on to become a young adult who felt proud of their identity and could accept who they were.

I pointed out to him that being a lesbian or being gay was not something that you could one day catch or that a government could encourage you to be – that it was something that you were born as and eventually people will be who they were born to be. He assured me that would not be the case for his family, and I assured him that if his child was at one of our schools that had the Safe Schools program and did in fact identify at some stage as being part of the LGBTIQ+ community, he could be assured that the school, the teaching staff and the support staff would have access to resources to support his daughter.

In 2022 and the lead-up to that election that we had last November, there was a lot of dog whistling that happened, not on this side of the house but in the opposition's ranks. Member for Brighton, it is lovely to have you back in here because I am just talking about political hot potatoes. There were numerous people who were running for the upper house – and you can guess which region they ran in – attending places in my community talking about being someone of faith and that being someone of faith meant that things like our conversion therapy practice, which I know that the Liberals actually voted in favour of, was something that we had done to impinge on their religious freedom and their faith and that Labor was against their faith. It was something quite outrageous actually. Time and time again I visited different parts of my community –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, in relation to standing order 118 and reflections on members, the member just said that the opposition voted in favour of conversion therapy. That is absolutely untrue. In fact not only did we vote against it, I spoke publicly against it. I think it discredits the member to be making those types of assertions in the chamber.

Paul Edbrooke: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I do not believe that is a point of order. The member was talking about a group of people, not reflecting on an actual member, and she was pertinent to the subject at hand. I believe this is just a gratuitous opportunity for the opposition to hear themselves again. It is not for the opposition to judge whether the truth is told in this place.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng HeangTak): There is no point of order, member for Brighton.

Sarah CONNOLLY: As I was just saying, it is very disappointing to see current-day members of those opposite in the other place attending different venues in the western suburbs and what I would

say is misleading people about bills that have been put through this house to ensure that all Victorians are safe, that we have equality and that there is fairness.

In the time that I have got left I do want to say that the Safe Schools program is something that is incredibly important in our local schools. Teachers, time and time again, have reached out to me to talk about the importance and the times that they have been able to draw down on the plethora of information that sits on that website. It is a conversation that I will continue to have, not with a lot of people—despite what some might think, there are not a lot of people of this view—but with people who are wondering or a bit nervous about what the real purpose of Safe Schools is. I always say to them that the reason why we had to roll out this program is that we knew that young children, students at school, were really suffering. They were bullied, they were harassed and they were more likely to self-harm and commit suicide. A child's life, every life, is incredibly precious. Safe Schools is about protecting that through education, through acceptance and through tolerance. It is something that time and time again members on this side of the house have stood and spoken so passionately about and have called out time and time again. It is sad to see it have to happen, time and time again—even today, on IDAHOBIT—about behaviour and activities and words that have been used by people that continue to sit in the Liberal Party. It is absolutely appalling continuing to see us having to call this out time and time again. I really do hope in the years to come that we can celebrate that there is true equality and fairness and justice for all.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (15:54): I rise to support the motion. The Greens unequivocally support Safe Schools and recognise how vitally important it is to support our LGBTIQ+ community. I would like to give a nod to Roz Ward, who spearheaded and founded the Safe Schools program. I was not supported in the way that students these days are supported. In fact I was brought to the principal's office for canoodling with my girlfriend in school. So I know firsthand how vitally important it is to ensure that our young queer folk are supported and feel loved and seen and heard and, importantly, safe and protected. Safe Schools should be rolled out and funded in every single school that receives government funding. The protections from this government just do not go far enough to make sure that everyone in our community is safe and protected.

This government is very good, and has been particularly good today, at strong statements. I see you all ordered your pins in time for IDAHOBIT—well done—and the cupcakes were delicious. But our queer community is scared. Our queer community is suffering from disproportionate rates of depression, of self-harm, of suicide. That is why the Greens yesterday attempted to introduce our bill to expand anti-vilification laws, so that all the hate speech and the vilification and the discrimination that has been spoken about today in this chamber can be made unlawful. We will continue to push to strengthen the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 so that no school in Victoria and no service in Victoria can discriminate against people on the basis of their sexuality, their gender or their gender expression. We will push to strengthen the powers and to increase the funding of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, not slash funding and slash jobs like this government is planning to do in this upcoming budget.

This year alone we have seen the far right mobilising and the threats to our queer community escalating. We have seen neo-Nazis converging on the steps of Parliament with anti-trans groups spouting anti-trans rhetoric. We have seen members of this Parliament using their platform to spread vitriol. Ten inclusive, family-friendly events that have been organised in libraries across Victoria have been cancelled because of threats from the far right. The need to act is now. It is not just about strong statements. These actions send a strong message to our queer community, and every day this government delays it reinforces this message: you are not safe. You are not safe in the library, you are not safe in Parliament, you are not safe in the street, you are not safe in your school.

This Premier turned his back yesterday. Literally and figuratively he turned his back on a queer MP standing up to represent the queer community, begging for protections against vilification and hate speech, begging for protections for our queer community. Instead of congratulatory motions and

patting ourselves on the back, my colleagues and I in the Greens will continue fighting until everyone in our queer community is safe and protected and truly free to be who they are.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (15:58): As a former teacher I am very pleased to rise and speak on this motion today. As the member for Ringwood said, it is very hard to sit here and listen to some of the well-wishing, some of the positive thoughts, some of the unicorn-like approaches from those on the opposition benches when you look at the members of their party. Some of those members of that party are fanning those flames of hate. When we hear about issues with especially young LGBTIQ kids – that they are reading things about themselves, about their community, on social media, on Facebook, on Twitter, on Instagram – these are the people who are the catalysts for that. These are the leaders in our community that are fanning that hate. It is very peculiar to be standing here and hearing some really well-meaning people on that side of the chamber who, if I can put it mildly, could really use some backbone, could really stand up in their own chambers, in their own caucus –

The SPEAKER: I need to interrupt business for the matter of public importance.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Economic policy

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Sandringham proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house condemns the financial mismanagement of the Andrews Labor government and the impact of debt-fuelled spending on Victorian families and businesses, noting that:

- (1) debt is set to increase by 43 per cent from \$116 billion in 2022–23 to \$166 billion in 2025–26 and on current trajectories is set to reach \$187 billion in 2026–27;
- (2) interest payments are set to almost double by 2025–26 and on current trajectories are set to reach \$9.2 billion in 2026–27;
- (3) interest payments will grow as a share of government revenue from nearly 5 per cent to 8 per cent by 2025–26, which means less money is available for frontline services;
- (4) Victorians are paying the highest taxes in Australia;
- (5) unemployment is expected to increase from 3.6 per cent now to 4.5 per cent in 2025–26; and
- (6) regional communities represent 25 per cent of Victoria's population, but receive only 13 per cent of the Victorian Labor government's infrastructure spend.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:02): I rise to address today's matter of public importance, which of course, on the Wednesday of the sitting week before the budget, you would expect, as an opposition-led MPI, to be on the state of Victoria's economy. Sadly, I do not have good news. Victorians are paying more and are getting less. We are paying more, and we are getting less. Victorian families – Victorians right around this state – are being ripped off by this Andrews Labor government every day of the week, and it is because the Andrews Labor government are mired in debt, are addicted to taxes and have let fly a culture of waste, which is being driven by their dependence on the union movement. Waste is in their DNA. They have created a financial emergency which every Victorian is now paying for. We are the highest taxed state in the nation, with a higher amount of debt than any other state. Each and every day the people of Victoria are paying \$10 million – each and every day – just to service the debt. On the government's own figures that is increasing to \$20 million a day, each and every day, just to service the debt and the economic circumstance that those opposite have got us into.

Why does that matter? Why does that matter in your community and why does that matter in my community? Because it means we have got less money and less opportunity to do the things that matter. I think of how \$10 million could be transformational in my community of Sandringham. I think of how \$10 million could be transformational in my colleagues' communities. In my own community I know that \$10 million would provide the needed infrastructure for three local primary

schools, and that is just the interest repayment that we are paying today. What about tomorrow? At the end of the week it will be \$70 million. In just two short years time, on the government's own figures, it will be increasing from \$10 million a day to \$20 million a day, and on the government's own projections in the pre-election budget update, it is only getting worse.

Victoria's tax take is set to double since this government was elected nine years ago, and over the next three years Labor's tax take will continue to increase, on their own figures, by more than 14 per cent. Next Tuesday's budget is set to inflict more pain on Victorians at a time when they can least afford it. Victorian families in need of everyday cost-of-living relief are instead likely to be hit with job losses, higher taxes and cuts to health, roads and community infrastructure.

Coming out of the federal budget just last week, I would like to think that state Labor would look to federal Labor and think they had a friend. On the basis of the budget that the Albanese government delivered and the impact that has on Victoria, it is clear that they have no friend, and from a Victorian Labor perspective they have no impact with their Labor mates in the nation's capital. At a time when New South Wales and Queensland both receive in roads funding \$10 billion, Victoria receives \$5.8 billion. Some people in this chamber may have had the opportunity to drive on roads in New South Wales and to drive on roads in Queensland. In comparison to the roads we have here in Victoria, they are actually all right in New South Wales, they are actually all right in Queensland, but in Victoria they are absolute deathtraps. Yes, that is in regional Victoria, and I am grateful to a number of country members and certainly National Party colleagues who are in the chamber today to hear this. They will know that better than most people. Why do New South Wales and Queensland get \$10 billion and why do we in Victoria get \$5.8 billion? If the Victorian Labor government in this state were looking to Canberra for a friend, perhaps they do not have a friend in me.

When it comes to health – an \$810 million cut to hospitals in Victoria. The last time I checked we were in the midst of a health crisis. You still need to wait 6 hours to be seen at the Box Hill Hospital emergency department just to be assessed. We still have ambulances ramping right around this state. We still have emergency situations, code reds and code oranges most days of the week. What does Canberra deliver for Victoria but an \$810 million cut to our hospitals? And then you look further north again to Queensland, where the Olympics will be hosted in about eight years time – by one measure sometime in the never-never. But in the next four years the Commonwealth Games will be hosted here in Victoria. The federal government's contribution to Queensland for the Olympics in eight years time was around \$3.5 billion in this federal budget, and what do we get in Victoria for the Commonwealth Games?

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: Doughnuts. Thank you, member for Narracan. Absolute and utter doughnuts. We know the Premier likes doughnuts, but in this case doughnuts mean pain for Victorians.

Not since the Cain–Kirner governments of the late 1980s and early 1990s have we seen such financial delinquency in this state. Because of Labor's financial incompetence Victorians are now paying \$10 million a day in interest alone on our soaring debt. Major projects, as I have said before and many have said before, have blown out by more than \$30 billion, and we are facing future delays to the Melbourne Airport rail link and Geelong fast rail. Waste and delays are part of this government's DNA. Victorians are paying the highest taxes of any state in the nation – \$5638 per person thanks to 44 new or increased taxes introduced by this Labor government in the last nine years. They make mistakes, and every Victorian pays the price of their mistakes.

If you are a parent wanting to send your child to a state school, you pay, over the course of sending your child to that state school from foundation right through to year 12, \$102,807 to educate your child – the highest education expense in a public school system in the nation. Compare that to the outcomes that students in Victoria are, sadly, receiving compared to other states, and it does not equate. Victorians are paying for a health system that spends less per person on public hospitals than any other state or territory except South Australia. Victorians time and time again, whether it be car rego with

bad roads, whether it be health and hospitals with bad outcomes or whether it be more for education with worse results, are paying more, and they are getting less every day of the week because of the way that this government has managed the Victorian economy.

While the Premier blames the federal government, the pandemic, the Reserve Bank – he blames everybody except the person who is actually responsible for the circumstance that they have got us into, and that is, frankly, himself. No wonder his colleagues, like the minister at the table, the Minister for Industry and Innovation, are canvassing support as speculation ramps up about when the Premier might leave, because you cannot be the problem and also the solution. This is a tired government, mired in debt, that has run out of ideas, that has run out of a legislative program in this place, that is addicted to taxes and has no plans to get us out of that mess that it has created itself.

So what should the Andrews government do? Well, for this budget to be credible and to actually help Victorians that need help at this point in time, it must create jobs, not cut them. It must not raise taxes or introduce new ones. It must provide stamp duty relief for first home buyers and provide funding to tackle our dangerous roads. It must rein in debt and cost blowouts on major projects. It must commit to building the Melbourne Airport rail link and the Geelong fast rail, particularly when the federal government funding is there for both of those projects. Victorians have waited long enough, so what is the Andrews government waiting for? It must deliver the operating surplus that it promised in last year's budget of \$0.9 billion promised in 2025–26, and it must secure and upgrade the state's credit rating and put Victoria on a sustainable financial footing. I am sorry to say that in my view, in our view, there is little cause for optimism. There is little cause for optimism because the Premier has spoken about 'very difficult' decisions ahead because of the government's – in his words, not mine – 'extraordinary' debt levels, and he has refused to rule out new taxes or tax increases.

Then there is the issue of last year's state budget. It condemned Victoria to a 43 per cent rise in debt over the next three years. It nearly doubled the state's annual interest repayments to \$7.4 billion. That is \$7.4 billion that could be used, if it was not being used to pay off our debt, on the things that matter to the lives of everyday Victorians: teachers in schools, nurses in hospitals, police on the beat keeping our community safe – but we cannot do that. We cannot do that because of the economic circumstance that this government has got us in. When a household or a business has too much debt, it is often the family members, owners and shareholders who might bear the brunt of those decisions that were made. It might not always seem fair, but that is often the case. But when this government goes on a debt-fuelled spending spree, it is the 6.8 million Victorians who pay for the decisions that it has made. Some Victorians will now pay the price of the Andrews government's debt-fuelled spending through job cuts, reduction to services and cancellation of and delays in vital infrastructure projects. The Premier himself told Victorians before the state election last November that they could have it all when he knew they simply could not. Not only did he promise something he could not deliver but he is now about to punish the people for his own and his government's incompetence. They deserve better.

In the time that I have remaining I want to debunk just a couple of myths ahead of next Tuesday's state budget. I am sure that over the next few weeks we will hear those opposites say that we are in this financial circumstance because of COVID. Well, let me tell you why this is not true. The projected 2022–23 net debt from 2019–20 figures was \$54.9 billion. Now, let us be generous: by the government's own figures, their total COVID spend was \$35.8 billion. Well, that still does not add up, because our current net debt position is \$116 billion. Before anyone pulls out the calculator, and I know the member for Frankston is very keen to do so, the difference between what was projected – and let us be very generous and say that all of the COVID spending is considered against your net debt position. There is still a difference of \$25.3 billion. So to say that we are in the financial circumstance that we are currently in because of COVID is absolute bollocks. It is absolute rubbish. No-one should buy that lie, and I think very highly of Victorians. I think very, very highly of them, and I am sure that they will not buy that lie.

The SPEAKER: The member for Sandringham, that word is unparliamentary.

Brad ROWSWELL: Thank you, Speaker. I seek to make that table available to the house.

Within that COVID spending of \$35.8 billion, there are certain things which are questionable. It is questionable whether they are in fact COVID related or related to items of normal government spending. Included in that by the government's own figures from the Department of Treasury and Finance's own website is \$110 million for the government's power saving bonus and \$94 million spent on community sports, \$67 million spent on Solar Homes and \$38 million spent on clean energy. It is questionable that when the government says that their debt has been exacerbated by the COVID circumstance and they consider all of this as part of the COVID spending that it has in fact been COVID spending at all.

Before we hear in rebuttal from members of the government that they have doubled Victoria's public service and therefore Victoria's public sector wage bill, let me just draw the house's attention to something that I found particularly staggering – a 142 per cent increase in public servants earning around \$350,000 since 2019 and a tripling in bureaucrats earning more than \$500,000 since 2019. This is not the reality of Victorians. This is not the reality of Victorian families. We are paying more, we are getting less. We deserve better.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:18): Well, that kind of inspired me I think to join Toastmasters. That was great. Not much substance there though. I have seen more meat on a butcher's pencil, I reckon. We are here this afternoon, to give this context, to hear what has become a bit of a partisan review of Victoria's economy, which you would expect, by an opposition that is so incompetent and so bad with numbers that even their federal colleagues want to sack them and put them into administration, and these are the federal colleagues who ran up more debt in nine months than federal Labor did in six years. That is contextualising where we sit right now.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my left who are not in their allocated seats will cease interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Cease interjecting, please.

So that gives us a bit of a foundation of where we sit with this matter of public importance today. We have got a bunch of people that between 2010 and 2014 built nothing, have got nothing to show and did nothing at all telling us, post COVID, that we should not, I assume, have spent money to keep people safe and keep Victoria going along at a decent rate. That is what I am hearing now. I am hearing now that those opposite do not actually like the power saving bonus because it is spending money. It is bloody well spending money on Victorians. Excuse me. I withdraw.

A member interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: I am sorry. Did the middle of my sentence interrupt the start of yours?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, member for Frankston.

Paul EDBROOKE: Anyway, we can see they are a little bit fired up. We know that the count is 11–19, and it is not a good sign for them. But let me be clear: we cannot change history, and I do not want to change history; I am proud of what we did during COVID to keep our community safe. But you cannot change history, and those opposite have to look back and think, 'Well, we cavorted with conspiracy theorists.'

We had shadow ministers out there saying, 'Okay, we need to kill the bats. We need to kill the bats in Kew.' I miss the former member for Kew; I do love the current member for Kew. But in all seriousness, while this state opposition did everything they could, more than any other state opposition

of any colour or creed in Australia, to undermine the health response in Victoria, we were using our balance sheet to protect Victorians and to protect the wellbeing of their families.

The reality is that debt is at manageable levels and we have a careful and deliberate four-step plan, which the Treasurer has been through many times in this house. Step one was creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring growth, because this government knows that you cannot have a sustainable fiscal recovery without first supporting a sustainable economic recovery – hand in hand, simple stuff. Step two: we are returning to an operating cash surplus. Step three: we are returning to operating surpluses, and step four is stabilising the debt levels. We are definitely making progress against that plan.

We know, as has been pointed out by the opposition, that Victorians are facing cost-of-living pressures. It is confusing to be standing here after helping more than 900 people gain their power saving bonus in my electorate – that is more than \$250,000 back in the pockets of bill payers in Frankston – and hearing people opposite saying they do not like the power saving bonus but they do feel for people who are going through cost-of-living pressures. Those interest rate rises we have seen, inflation – the Victorian government is dealing with situations that are not all of its own creation, and the Treasurer is doing that very well.

The rebound in Victoria's economy has been quite strong. If you listen to those opposite, they will howl on and cherrypick figures, but it has been quite strong. I think that is not just testament to us big-noting ourselves as a government, it is actually testament to the Victorian community and the economy that we have built together. Last year's budget demonstrated that the government is now delivering on steps two and three of that fiscal plan I spoke about, with a cash surplus forecast for the coming financial year and the path to an operating surplus in 2025–26.

I just want to go through some of the current economic developments for those opposite, because they have said they feel a bit down, they are a bit depressed, they do not have faith, they weep for the future – things actually are moving along in Victoria at a great rate. Victoria, being the most densely populated state and the nation's manufacturing, services, innovation and knowledge powerhouse, is still that way, and Melbourne is Australia's fastest growing city. Under the Andrews Labor government Victoria is part of the world's 14th largest economy, but we have been the powerhouse of Australia's economy. In 2022 Victoria was ranked as Australia's best performing economy, leading the nation in both retail trade and employment. Victoria's annual rate of growth was one of the fastest at 6 per cent in the March quarter 2022. Victoria's total value of goods and services consumption grew over 50 per cent faster than the rest of the nation in 2021 and at twice the level of New South Wales in the March quarter of 2022, and Victoria accounts for 3 per cent of Australia's landmass but more than 23 per cent of Australia's total gross domestic product – or in figures, \$454 billion GDP coming from Victoria as part of our nation's \$2.309 trillion GDP. Victoria's economy has experienced strong growth over the last decade and is forecast to grow by at least 3.25 per cent in 2022–23.

Currently that unemployment rate that we have heard about – 3.6 per cent – is at its lowest since records began. I remember being a wide-eyed and bushy-tailed member for Frankston in 2015. I came into this place and it was only then I realised that we were coming into government after a Liberal government in Victoria that had overseen the highest unemployment on the mainland in Australia. Again, with that kind of foundation we are working off and with that context, we have got people here trying to tell us that they know the figures and the numbers when really it is just cherrypicking, and bad cherrypicking at that. Currently the economic strength of Victoria is demonstrated through the creation of 200,000 jobs since the beginning of 2021, but Victoria actually created a target to create 400,000 jobs by 2025, and guess what? We have smashed that.

We have helped create 460,000 jobs since September 2020, and that figure is growing as we speak. That is because we have a plan. It is not about opening up, killing bats – that reactive kind of decision-making. It is about actually having a plan. Having a cohesive team helps too, a cohesive team who are all on the same page about where we go with Victoria and who endorse a vision for Victoria – and a

vision for Victoria that was thoroughly endorsed by Victorians at the election. Let us not forget that. We can talk about the economy, we can talk about COVID and we can talk about the effects on the economy and where we are going, but post COVID the people in Victoria chose a government that got them through that. They chose a government that chose responsible lending and responsible spending to ensure that their families put food on the table, to ensure that mums and dads had jobs, to ensure that kids went to school, to ensure that there were enough masks, there were enough immunisations, there were enough tests to go around so we could start operating as a community again.

It is pretty obvious that those opposite have zero credibility. I mean, nothing will tell you that more than pre election. I was even surprised when I looked at the Channel 9 news and a member of the opposition could not even tell us how much their commitments were going to cost the Victorian people – at an interview designed around that question, to present to the Victorian people the Liberal Party's commitments, the Liberal Party's offerings at this election and how much they would cost. He had to defer. It was very embarrassing, and I honestly could not believe what I was watching. But again we stand here today, and it is not very refreshing to have those opposite questioning what Victorians have wholeheartedly and thoroughly endorsed and what I believe next Tuesday they will endorse as well, because Victorians are smart people and they know that sometimes there are ebbs and there are flows. Sometimes we have to prioritise things. Sometimes when we have unforeseen circumstances like COVID we need to spend money, we need to invest and we need to lend, and that is what this government did.

Now, I should not forget to say by way of contrast that we have got that 460,000 jobs figure under the Andrews Labor government. Can anyone remember or even guess how many jobs the opposition managed to create between 2010 and 2014? Wait – come on the member for Narracan, you have got this – 39,000 jobs, plus their own, say 50 or so, or a bit less now. But we have created those 465,000 full-time jobs, and we are establishing the Victorian Future Fund to help pay down that pandemic debt as well. Every dollar put into that fund, much like an offset savings account or an offset mortgage account, every dollar of earnings will be quarantined to use and repay COVID borrowings. I know those opposite would like us at times to think we are just in an echo chamber – and sometimes in this chamber and the other chamber I think we are – but we are not alone in this fight against COVID and to then repair the fiscal damage to our economies. All over the world this is happening, and if you look at the data, countries like Australia and states like Victoria are indeed not in the worst shape when you look at some other states and nations around the world. We are doing very similar things, though, but we are not as badly off as others. In fact there is a lot of light in the tunnel.

Net debt will be lower in every year than previously forecast, reaching 24.6 per cent of gross state product by June 2026. Some asked for the source before. That is from the pre-election budget update I believe. Interest repayments are manageable because this government is doing the legwork to bring the budget back to sustainability. There is a reason why I think we on this side of the chamber are delivering the budget next week and those opposite are not, and it is again because Victorians knew at the previous election that there is zero economic credibility – which is kind of strange, because we still have people in certain parties propagating the stereotype that they are better economic managers. I think that fallacy has been done and dusted and no-one believes that anymore, that is for sure.

We are committed to ensuring also that our tax system remains fair and competitive, and I note that there have been some tales told, some inaccuracies, by those opposite. We are the party that cut the payroll tax to 1.2125 per cent, the lowest in the nation. It is interventions like this that have seen the unemployment level at a regional level fall to historic lows. There has not been a single month where regional unemployment was higher under this government than it was under the coalition, in fact.

Speaking of taxes, as I said, there have been some untruths. We have heard the Liberals talk about tax changes under this government while referring to some dodgy tricks and whatnot – you know, surcharges for foreign landowners and taxes to them. Well, here is a newsflash: that is not a tax on Victorians. That is a tax on people that live overseas and own land in Victoria; it is not a tax on Victorians. But that shows how desperate the opposition are to create a dialogue around this government and the economy. I do not

think anyone in Victoria is listening. They voted us in on our strong economic credentials. They voted us in to do what needed to be done, and certainly we have done that.

Today we have heard some interesting reflections on the Premier as well, and I will go on record as saying I do not think anyone on any side of politics will know how hard that might have been for an individual leader. People in here might pass judgement, but when you have been through what the Premier has been through and made the decisions that the Premier has made, I am sure the opinions of those opposite are like water off a duck's back. I do not think it matters too much; I think he is too busy being interested in the opinions of the Victorians he speaks to every day.

The Victorian government is committed to the economy of the future. You will hear other Labor members speak on this – our support on initiatives including the Big Build of course but also an unprecedented \$1.7 billion energy package creating renewable energy hubs across the state of Victoria and jobs following the pandemic. We are estimating nearly 59,000 jobs for the SEC, but also what comes with that is the net zero emissions target, which was for 2050 and now is for 2045, with 75 to 80 per cent less emissions by 2035, which is among the most ambitious targets in the world.

On that, I would like to conclude by saying it is one thing to talk about the economy and it is one thing to talk about repairing the economy, but also this is a government that can actually walk and chew gum at the same time. We are leading the nation. We are leading the state as well as repairing this economy. We will always be the powerhouse of Australia, whether it be through innovation or whether it be through manufacturing, and we will continue to do that through the great decision-making of this Treasurer and this Premier.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:33): I am pleased to rise to support the member for Sandringham on his excellent matter of public importance, which is a ripper, but it is a very sad state of affairs that we are talking about today. I was looking just today at the pictures of the 60th Parliament. I saw an old bald bloke in there, and I suddenly realised it was me. I am actually not as old as I look, but I am reasonably old, and I remember the 1980s and 90s. I am seeing in this matter of public importance and the issues that we are addressing that we are feeling a bit of history here. We are going into the third term of a Labor government. We have got budgets in deficit. We have got debt going through the roof. We have got a Premier who is about to hand over the mess to a female replacement, and we have got the SEC in trouble as well. It is just a bit like the Cain–Kirner days. I know I have been around for a bit and we have been saying this about Labor governments for a while, but it is now absolutely coming true. As we headed towards 25 per cent of gross state product being made up of our state debt, I remember asking the Department of Treasury and Finance in a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing last year if we have seen worse. The answer was no. This is getting worse – worse than the Cain–Kirner years – and it is a fact that this government has lost absolute control of the state's finances and it is Victorians that are paying.

James Newbury interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, I could have added, member for Brighton, that on the horizon is a Liberal leader from the eastern suburbs who is going to have to come in and clean up all the mess when he becomes Premier. That is the next thing that is going to have to happen, because this mob have showed time and time again that they are incapable of actually delivering and picking up the pieces of the mess that they make consistently.

The member for Sandringham is belling the cat, and I think it is true that Victorians are starting to wake up. They are just starting to see, and people are starting to say to us on a daily basis: '\$10 million a day – is that right?' We are paying \$10 million a day in interest repayments. I hear those opposite a lot when they are in government talk about cuts by the previous Liberal–National government, by the Kennett government and by the federal coalition government, but what they never talk about is the economic management required to ensure that the budget is balanced so that you have the money to deliver the services and the infrastructure that the public needs. Ten million dollars a day, from a local perspective

for me in my electorate of Gippsland South: I am looking for a new Sale college in the budget next week; that could be delivered in a week of interest repayments. I have got the fire stations at Mirboo North, Foster and Yarram that I am waiting for funding on. You could do those in about 18 hours with the funding that is being spent on interest payments. I have got 'kamikaze corner' in Leongatha, which the Leader of the Nationals has come with me to a couple of times. Every time I take him there to highlight how bad it is, there is nearly an accident while we are getting the photo, and that could be fixed in probably three or four days with the money that this government is spending on interest payments every day – \$10 million a day. And if I look at the matter of public importance, which indicates that by 2025 interest payments will be \$9.2 billion, well, that takes it up to \$25 million a day.

That is absolutely reckless economic management, and it is going to hurt Victorians, who are paying more. We have had 44 new or increased taxes by this government since 2014, and Victorians are getting less because the services and the service delivery are just not there. That is the importance of economic management. Economic management is not about lots of black in the columns. It is not about making a Treasurer feel good about themselves. It is about making sure that you have the finances under control so that you can deliver the services and the infrastructure that Victorians need.

It is extraordinary that we have got to this position. I want to talk a bit about how we got here. As the member for Sandringham has indicated, a lot of the blame is put on COVID. I am just going to back up some of the things he said. What is never mentioned by the Premier or the Treasurer or the Deputy Premier is that before we went into COVID, in March 2020, the state budget had already gone into deficit. In the December quarter of the 2019–20 year the state government budget was in deficit. We had a government that promised in 2018, two days before the election, that they would raise government net debt from 6 per cent of gross state product to 12 per cent, and we are now, as I just said before, heading toward 25 per cent. So to suggest that we have just had this happen because of COVID is a fallacy. For all my sins I have done eight years on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

A member: You are still there.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am still there, and I am really looking forward to the minister at the table the Minister for Public Transport coming to PAEC in a couple of weeks because we have got some rippers for him too. But in PAEC every year we see the budget figures showing what the public service is going to cost, and every year the estimate is wrong because the government cannot keep control of the numbers in the public service and the cost of the public service. It says that this was all about COVID. The member for Sandringham has indicated that it was not; he has given us the figures. The member for Frankston has actually gone out now to go and check the member for Sandringham. He is out there with a calculator now. But if it was true, let us look at the results of how we went through COVID.

We had the most cases in Australia. We had the most deaths, particularly in that first wave in 2020 when we had the infamous hotel quarantine. We had the world's longest lockdowns. We had the biggest impacts on business. As a result of all that, as a result of the government's great management of looking after COVID, they are the results we got, and we have ended up with the biggest deficits and the biggest debt – more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania. Obviously, as everyone knows, COVID did not happen there. There was no COVID in the other states of Australia, was there? Oh, was there? No, maybe there was. For the Premier to say that this was all the COVID debt and now we have got to pay it back – and the absolute gall of his statements last week to blame the Reserve Bank and say, 'They made me do it. It was the Reserve Bank, everybody, that said I had to go out and rack up this debt.' Well, Tasmania, Queensland and New South Wales did not rack up \$165 billion of debt, so that line is absolute bullocks. The Premier needs to come back to the facts and understand that Victorians will see through this. If we are paying for the management of COVID, then we are paying for something we did not get because it was not very good.

There are so many issues that are now being affected. I have indicated before, as the member for Sandringham said, there are 44 new or increased taxes. Half of those new or increased taxes are on property, and now these geniuses opposite and their fellow travellers in the Greens up there are

surprised that we have got a housing affordability crisis. He attacks housing and the prices go up. How can that possibly be? That is just unfathomable – that continued mismanagement of the finances when you have just got to keep on jacking up the taxes, keep on jacking up land tax and raking it in.

Brad Rowswell: Debt-fuelled spending.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is debt-fuelled spending, as the member for Sandringham says, and it is hurting Victorians. It is hurting them on things like housing affordability, and it is hurting them on things like the cost of living. I mentioned the SEC. I do not have time to go into energy prices and how well that is going under this government. But in return, what are we getting? We have got a disaster of a health system at the moment. It is not getting any better. It is now over 12 months since the worst of the pandemic, and the health system is still in crisis. You cannot get an ambulance half the time. We have got allegations on the front page of the *Herald Sun* today about how the government manages ambulance response times in the public domain. We have got our roads crumbling right across the state, and regional Victorians know it all too well.

The final point to the matter of public importance is the absolute disregard for regional Victoria. It is 25 per cent of the state. As the report that we had produced by the Parliamentary Budget Officer last year stated – the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer; he was so independent he has been let go by the government now, because he actually belled the cat as well on things like that – 13 per cent of infrastructure spending was happening in rural and regional Victoria. So we are getting less under Labor. We are getting more debt and bigger deficits. Victorians are paying more and getting less.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (16:42): I am very pleased to contribute to this matter of public importance and my contribution will primarily focus on regional Victoria, given the comments that we have just heard from the last speaker and the points of this MPI. I think regional Victoria is very important to all of us. We have, I think, 18 regional members.

A member: Eighteen?

Chris COUZENS: Eighteen – I believe it is 18 regional members. I will mention the fact that we did pick up Ripon in the 2022 election with an amazing candidate, the now member for Ripon. We should be very proud of that, and she should be very proud of the work that she has done to enable us to pick up that seat.

I do want to focus on regional Victoria, given that the Geelong region is really important to Victoria – obviously. My seat of Geelong, the seat of Lara, the seat of South Barwon and the seat of Bellarine were all picked up again in the 2022 election. So in 2014 Labor won the election. In 2018 Labor won the election. In 2022 Labor won the election. Why did we win the election? Because those opposite are still banging on about the same old stuff that people have passed over – banging on about the impacts of COVID and the money being spent and all those ridiculous comments that you have just come out with. And who won the election six months ago? Not you. People are over that.

They know that this government has provided a safe and secure environment for those people that needed it during one of the worst periods that this country – that the world – has seen in our lifetime. So for the opposition to make ridiculous comments about spending too much money and not creating enough jobs is ridiculous. It is absolutely ridiculous. I am shocked that they have actually put it on the table, because it gives us an opportunity to reflect on what we have delivered since 2014 and in particular what we achieved and what we did during the worst period of this state's history in dealing with COVID-19. For the decisions that the Premier and senior ministers had to make during that time they deserve applause, not the criticism that we continue to hear from this mob over here.

These are important things. We had the Leader of the Opposition in 2022 come to Geelong and tell my community that they were not going to give them any further business support, that Geelong would become part of Melbourne and that key areas like climate change were the responsibility of industry and not government. Is it any wonder they lost the election and did not come anywhere near us in Geelong?

A member: Was Darryn Lyons the candidate?

Chris COUZENS: No, that was 2018; 2022 was a different candidate. What we have now got in Victoria is that this government holds 18 regional seats. Every one of those regional members is representing and advocating for their community all the time, and they are delivering for their community. We see lots of announcements across regional Victoria, and there are lots of announcements in my electorate of Geelong. The big infrastructure projects are actually creating jobs. We do not have an issue with jobs in Geelong. We want those things to be coming into our community, the infrastructure jobs: the great things like the women's and children's hospital and the jobs that that will bring – and we are all looking forward to that building over the next couple of years – and the schools and upgrades that have happened there and the rebuilds of schools. We have had a significant share in my community of Geelong and right across the Geelong region. There is the tech school, having that built and the jobs created from that, and then the jobs created for the really amazing teachers that are in there teaching our secondary school students. There is the Green Spine and the Geelong Arts Centre, which we are about to see open in August this year.

The investment in Geelong has really been significant, and what it has done is create jobs and create a vibrancy in my community, where people can see what we are delivering every day that we are in government. They appreciate that fact. They are not worried about what those opposite are saying over there, I can tell you now. They will often say that they have not delivered anything for them. They do not even go and talk to them, in fact. We picked up South Barwon in 2018. We have been able to maintain those four key Labor seats in Geelong, and I think we will continue to maintain them if that is the performance that those opposite are going to deliver and talk about – making Geelong a part of Melbourne and not supporting the community and infrastructure not being the role of government. Well, my community would differ on that opinion, because we like to see those big infrastructure projects coming in. We want to see three-year-old kinder being rolled out. That will make such a huge difference. The childcare facilities that we have committed to over the next decade will enable women to go to work or parents to go to work and not have to worry about having to pay for child care.

These are really significant reforms that this government has made, which is why regional communities are continuing to vote for a Labor government. It is because of what we are doing. We have made significant reforms from the time we were elected in 2014 right up until the current day, and we will continue to do that, because we listen to what regional communities are saying. We are listening to what they need in terms of services and the changes that the communities want to see. We do not need negative stories coming into our community that are not even true, I have got to say. The misinformation that gets put out there by those opposite in our communities is unacceptable. It is all they know. It is about telling misinformation to communities like mine and others across regional Victoria.

Regional Victoria plays such a significant role. We can talk about agriculture and all those really important things. I know the minister responsible in the other place has such a strong commitment to agriculture and to regional Victoria. What she has been able to deliver is incredible, and also in our TAFE sector, delivering free TAFE. That free TAFE, we are now seeing the results of. When I go to the TAFE in Geelong or I go to visit an employer, I meet those people that have been the beneficiaries of a free TAFE course, people who may never have had that opportunity in the past. A lot of them are the first people in their family to actually get a qualification. That is really significant, and they are the things that matter to our communities, not this rubbish that gets put out by those opposite. It is those people out there that are actually experiencing the results of our reforms and our delivery of infrastructure and the things that really matter to people. That is why people are voting –

A member interjected.

Chris COUZENS: The social infrastructure, that is right. So these are really important things to keep in mind when we are talking about regional Victoria. Those opposite delivered nothing in Geelong when they were in power, I have got to say, not one thing – not a school, not an infrastructure project that they could hang their hat on for the whole time they were in government.

A member interjected.

Chris COUZENS: Yes, they were all floating around big-noting themselves, but at the end of the day they delivered nothing. My community of Geelong were very much aware of that, and I think regional Victoria are very much aware of, I suppose, the inadequacies of those opposite. This matter is a ridiculous matter, I have to say. This MPI says nothing to regional Victoria or any other Victorian in this state because what they are saying is a load of rubbish. People are not interested in listening to it, and they can go on and on and on, because people are not listening to them. They are listening to the Andrews Labor government and they are supporting the Andrews Labor government, and regional Victoria is very grateful for that.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:52): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the matter today and support the member for Sandringham's matter of public importance. I have to say I echo the comments that the member for Sandringham made, and of course the member for Gippsland South, because Victorians are paying more but they are getting less. As we face the horror budget that we expect next week, the parlous state of Victoria's economy is a great cause of concern for all Victorians.

I think more concerning yet, however, is this government's cavalier attitude to how its own decisions are making these conditions worse and worse for Victorians. This government continues to spend as if debt and deficit are of no consequence. But perhaps that argument would have more weight if we were not coming off nearly 11 consecutive interest rate rises. Victorian families are feeling the pain. They understand what debt means and what interest rate rises mean for their mortgage repayments. I know the Premier and those opposite like to blame the RBA for the situation that Victoria is in today; they like to blame everyone they can rather than their mismanagement. But net debt in this state has literally never been higher, as the member for Gippsland South very adequately pointed out earlier, and it is set to reach around \$166 billion by 2025–26. This represents a whopping 25 per cent of the economy. That is 50 per cent higher than any other state in the federation. Since Labor won government in 2014, net debt as a percentage of gross state product has quadrupled from 5 per cent. We know those opposite like to blame COVID, but as the member for Sandringham pointed out, COVID is a small portion of that debt.

If we cast back to the post-Cain–Kirner recession, net debt as a percentage of GSP peaked at 16 per cent in 1993. Indeed Victoria's current level of net debt compares to the post Cain and Kirner recession peak of \$18.8 billion in 1995. That is equivalent to around \$35 billion in today's currency, so compared to back in the Cain–Kirner recession we are now more than \$100 billion further in debt than at the worst time in our state's history. No family would run their household budget in this way. It is irresponsible, to say the very least. It is impossible for a family or for a small business to have the capacity to run their budget in this way, and as we have heard today every single day Victorians are paying \$10 million in interest repayments on Labor's debt. Interest alone will be over \$7.3 billion within two years. That is money that could fix crumbling classrooms or reduce hospital waitlists for Victorians that are needing much-needed surgery, and as the member for Gippsland South pointed out, what could that do in your local electorate? In a couple of days we could have funded major upgrades to many of the schools in Kew – in Balwyn Primary School and Kew East Primary School. We could fund in about 10 days the much-needed infrastructure upgrade to the 48 tram. That is what that money could go to if it were not being spent on interest repayments.

It is not just us on this side of the house that are concerned about the Labor government's debt. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry noted in its own budget submission to the Treasurer that:

The Government should also focus on fiscal repair to reduce the State's debt via cost reduction and project control. It's imperative that the forecasted path to budget surplus is met, as we must protect the State's ability to borrow money at competitive rates, via our credit rating.

A clear warning there from the Victorian chamber. This is the debt and interest on debt that will have to be paid off by future generations in Victoria, and it is absolutely unconscionable that we would

choose to burden the youngest members of our society with this responsibility. Of course, that is not to say that current taxpayers are spared this burden. This government, as we know, is addicted to taxes. Victoria is the highest taxed state in the nation and has the highest amount of any state within the federation. Victorians, as we have seen, are paying more than \$5000 per person, yet tax revenue is forecast to increase by 14 per cent by 2025–26. What does that actually mean? That means an extra \$650 per person for every single Victorian in the years ahead because of rising taxes under this government.

As the Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability I have particular concern when it comes to this government's addiction to property taxes, and this is driving a housing affordability crisis we are seeing in this state. ABS figures show that Victoria has the highest reliance on property-related taxes compared to all other jurisdictions, equivalent to around 59 per cent of total tax revenue. Last financial year stamp duty alone contributed 33.9 per cent to the state's coffers. That tax directly hits homebuyers. Stamp duty tax directly hits first home buyers. Those opposite may be comfortable with that, but it is harder for people to get into their own homes and harder for them to buy their own home with taxes rising at every opportunity. We know those on the other side and the Premier himself have said that people do not care about home ownership anymore, it is no big deal and Victorians just want to rent forever. Well, we know that is not the case. We know that because a recent survey held by the *Age* showed that of those Victorians between 18 and 34, only 1 per cent said they did not want to buy their own home. It is clear that home ownership remains the goal of so many young Australians who seek the stability and the assurance that owning their own piece of this great state brings, and yet this government is doing nothing to fix this. In fact they are doing the opposite by raising taxes, whether that is stamp duty or whether that is land tax. Every part of this government is focused on how to make it harder for Victorians to get into their own home.

On the issue around housing affordability, if we look at some of the metrics here in Victoria, just today we saw those opposite in the other place vote against an inquiry into the rental crisis in Victoria, vote against an opportunity to bring people to the table – tenants, landlords and experts in this space – to better understand how we can actually put forward solutions to fixing the rental crisis in Victoria. But those opposite voted against that. Those opposite do not care about the opinions of those in the rental market. Home loans in Victoria are down 33 per cent on what they were one year ago, the biggest drop of all states. And out of all the states, new builds have fallen the most in Victoria, down in the past 12 months. It is getting harder and harder to own property in Victoria.

Beyond housing affordability, one of the big issues at play in this budget is clearly infrastructure cost blowouts. As a result of these cost blowouts we are seeing many of the major projects promised by those opposite being put at risk and not being built, whether that is the Geelong fast rail, the Melbourne Airport link, the North East Link, the Frankston to Baxter rail line, the Shepparton bypass or the Canterbury Road upgrade – all of these projects are seeing significant blowouts – or whether it is the \$13 billion on the North East Link, the \$8 billion combined on the West Gate Tunnel and the Metro Tunnel or the enormous blowout on the Suburban Rail Loop, which was initially looked at at \$50 billion but the Parliamentary Budget Office recently costed it at over \$125 billion. This is contempt for taxpayer dollars. There is no value for money, and now we are in a situation where the government has overpromised and is going to underdeliver.

On top of all of that, we have got agency blowouts, whether that is WorkCover, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority or the Victorian Building Authority – all in the red. Whether it is the Andrews government's budget itself or its agencies, we are seeing major financial mismanagement right across this state.

Next week the Labor government faces a crucial test. Will this government be up to the task of budget repair? Will it knuckle down and do the hard yards needed to get Victoria's economy back on track, or will there be more taxes, more deficits, more debt, more recklessness and more waste? Will the promised operating surplus of 2025–26 be delivered? Victorians deserve a budget that cuts taxes, particularly those property taxes that are crippling housing affordability in this state and making it

harder for first home buyers to get into the market. They deserve a budget without blowouts. They deserve a budget that brings down debt levels. They deserve a budget that will put Victoria on a sustainable financial footing where investment can occur in our hospitals, our schools and our roads so we can actually all get ahead. Victorians are paying more, but they are getting less.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (17:02): Deputy Speaker, it is great to see you in the chair. It is a pleasure to rise to speak on this motion – and the Shadow Treasurer, wasn't he full of zip and pep? But what he had in delivery he lacked in substance, and that selective cherrypicking of facts was matched by that hoary old trope, that Thatcherite trope that a state's or a nation's economy is just like a household budget. Spare me; if we are going to manage an economy like that, then no wonder those opposite are going to be out of power for a lot longer.

The federal Liberal Party might prefer it to be otherwise, but Victoria is not an entity unto itself. We are part of a federation. I believe the Shadow Treasurer touched upon the nature of federalism in his speech when he talked about roads in New South Wales and Queensland, but what he failed to mention is that Victoria exists as part of a federation, and at least since 1942 the federal government in Canberra has held the majority of the fiscal drivers of this country, the key levers and the drivers of national economic policy and prosperity.

I want to provide a little bit of context for the member for Sandringham. Under the Morrison government Australia was falling behind the rest of the world on a number of key economic and social measures. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, that government had badly managed the national economy. Real wages in Australia were 0.7 per cent lower in 2019 compared with 2013, with Australia ranked third-last out of 35 OECD countries for wage growth. Over eight years of that previous federal Liberal government Australia's productivity rate steadily declined, from 2013 when Australia ranked 10th among 34 OECD nations to 2018 when it ranked fifth. The federal Liberals under their revolving door of prime ministers presided over the worst period experienced by Australian household economies since the Great Depression – that might be a laughing matter to some members, but I think it is a tragedy for Australian households who experienced that decline. Real household disposable income fell by 1 per cent in the quarter leading up to March 2020, the last quarter before COVID hit. At that point it was half a per cent lower than in December 2011. So thanks to the policies of the previous federal Liberal government, Australian households did not just stand still. The policies of that party – the party opposite – sent them actively backwards. The typical Australian household experienced zero real income growth under that rotating door of the previous federal government.

Now, I want to talk about per capita incomes as well.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have been listening quite closely to the member who is on his feet at the moment. Having drafted the matter of public importance together with the Clerk that is before the house at the moment, there is no reference in the matter of public importance that I have drafted for the house's consideration that refers to the former federal Morrison Liberal government. On relevance, I would ask you to bring the member back to the matter of public importance being discussed.

Iwan WALTERS: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Shadow Treasurer has proposed an MPI that refers to the fiscal management of this state. As I was saying, this state exists as part of a Commonwealth in which fiscal policy and macro-economic policy are determined at a federal level. The policies of this government are responsive to that government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will rule on the point of order. I did actually listen to the opening contribution, and the federal government was mentioned in that contribution to my recollection, so it has been a fairly wideranging debate.

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: No, that is right. Much appreciated, member for Sandringham. Thank you, Deputy Speaker, for that clarification. I am not surprised that the Shadow Treasurer does not want to hear more of this important context, because if he did he would be trying to hide the fact that on a per capita basis the Australian economy managed by his party had a deep recession in the year just before COVID. It had a fixation on headline numbers, which were propped up by Australia's rapid population growth, and indeed it is only that population growth that prevented technical recessions from occurring on a regular basis through his party's management. I want to contrast this with the reforms of Labor, the Hawke and Keating government, which saw Australian per person GDP peak at about 3 per cent a year 20 years ago. It hit rock bottom under the Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison Liberal governments. Between 2013 and 2020 growth in real GDP per Australian citizen was the worst since the Great Depression, and that is what the Andrews Labor government's economic policies were always combating for the first two terms of our government. Isn't it great to have a new partner in Canberra that is committed to getting Australian wages moving again. That is why it is so relevant that this afternoon the ABS has just advised us that wages growth is at the highest level since 2012, at 3.7 per cent.

The Andrews government's investment in infrastructure is an integral part of our fiscal policy, but we are playing catch-up after four years of apathetic neglect, infighting and inaction that this party experienced or indulged in when it was last in power. Does that sound familiar to anybody else? Because it does to me. The infighting that is racking them at the moment was prevalent between 2010 and 2014, and that infighting meant that they were focused more on themselves than on delivering for Victorians. While those opposite sat on their hands for four years, we have been getting on with delivering the infrastructure and the services that growing communities absolutely need and deserve: schools, roads, public transport. This is a government in the tradition of Bracks and Brumby: sustainable fiscal management to enable delivery of quality infrastructure. I remember those years before 2010 when the Deer Park bypass was built out towards Melton—I was on that every week going up to Stawell; the Craigieburn bypass; the Calder Freeway extended road to Bendigo; the Craigieburn extension that residents in my community rely upon. What did we get between 2010 and 2014?

A member interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: Doughnuts, as the member for Narracan might say.

What is really important to me is that this government's fiscal policies have enabled investment in school infrastructure and the quality of teaching across Victoria. I was a teacher between 2010 and 2014, when educational standards and educational infrastructure atrophied in this state. What supports those is a sound, prudent fiscal policy and investment in the future. If we want a productive, diversified, successful economy that delivers for Victorians and provides them with the skills they need to thrive into the future, we need to be investing in education. What has this government done? It has built the Education State. It has invested in education infrastructure at a record level: \$12.8 billion of new and upgraded school buildings across Victoria, a record investment in our specialist schools, a record investment in TAFE and training after it was gutted by those opposite. I have worked in that sector, and it was shambolic, what we took over in 2014. Building the Education State is not an abstract concept, it is grounded in fiscal policy—grounded in this government's budget decisions. We put our money, Victorians' money, where our mouth is. We are committed to education because it delivers for Victorians.

So it is a bit rich to take lessons from the opposition, who have been out of power since 2014 I would argue precisely because they did not respond to the priorities of Victorians with their fiscal decisions. They did not deliver the infrastructure and services that a growing economy, a growing state, requires. This government has, as I said, with \$12.8 billion in new schools, ensuring that every Victorian family regardless of where they live have the infrastructure and the services they need to thrive through their life. There are 1890 capital projects at schools across the state. There are 100 new schools being built between 2019 and 2026, and we are ahead of schedule, with 75 already built. Victoria is leading the way on new school construction, with ABS data showing that nearly half of new schools that were built in Australia were built in Victoria, and the previous Parliamentary Secretary for Education knows that very well. I believe the shadow minister at the table talked about population growth driving some

of those things. It does drive those things, and that is why our fiscal policy has been responsive to that population growth. We have not sat on our hands doing nothing for four years, we have made sure that services and infrastructure keep pace with the growth of our state. That costs money. But it is an investment in our future, and the Treasurer will deliver another great budget next Tuesday.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:12): I am just horrified to think that the member who has just spoken has been misled, because he is the only one who is saying that it is going to be a good budget next week; everybody else is saying it is going to be a horror budget. Now, it is no secret that Victoria is mired in debt. Every day the state's finances take another hit and we go further and further down the gurgler. It is indeed very worrying. Nothing could be truer than the statement that we are paying more and getting less. Victorian families are being ripped off. It does not matter where you look, they are being ripped off, because this Andrews government is mired in debt. At the same time, they are addicted to taxes. This is one area where they have overdelivered, because Daniel Andrews said that there would be no new taxes. Even though there are 44 or so – I guess 44 times zero is still zero – that he has introduced –

Brad Rowswell: Underpromise, overdeliver.

Cindy McLEISH: He has underpromised and overdelivered with taxes. When you look at the figures that the taxation is drawing in, you can see why he is having to do this, because there is so much waste and so much mismanagement. This did not sneak up on us; this has been happening gradually. I think if you go back and have a look at the figures from the budget in 2019–20, where we had debt at \$44.3 billion and it was projected that by this time, 2022–23, it would be \$54.9 billion – whoa. From \$44 billion up to \$54.9 billion would be a \$10 billion jump in that four-year period, but it actually went up to \$116 billion. That is today; that is not over the forwards, where it is expected to go to \$166 billion. I do not know if the members on the other side are really aware that this has to be paid. Someone has to pay this money back. We cannot borrow and borrow and borrow. And who pays? The taxpayer pays: Joe Average, the family, everybody.

I want to go back to the 2019–20 levels, because at the time I remember us being quite concerned that debt was going to jump to \$54.9 billion. Then the bushfires hit and I thought, 'Well, they've got no hope of those projections.' Blow me down, you know, there were bushfires. We remember my electorate was hit. Mallacoota was hit quite badly, down in Gippsland. There were areas that really suffered badly, and the government was going to have to help with some of that. On top of that, we had COVID. When we look at why we have got this huge debt, it is pretty easy for people to say, 'Oh, we had bushfires and we had COVID.' Well, no, we have had an extraordinary culture of waste and mismanagement. If you have a look at the government's numbers on what COVID cost, COVID cost \$35.8 billion. With where we are today, with the debt that we have, that is a difference of \$25 billion anyway, so we have still got that extra \$25 billion. And it is not creeping up. The government has known this. They have had to try to do a few smoke-and-mirrors tricks, to have a look at the books a different way that they might be able to present them so it is harder to find. I will tell you, when you are going through the budget and you are looking for your portfolio's finances, there is a little bit here and a little bit there, and you have got to look under that rock because they have got things all over the place, which makes it harder to track. But we are pretty dedicated and committed to getting to the bottom of all of that.

With the state of our finances there is the obvious comparison with the Cain–Kirner government, and weren't we all in a bad state at that time. The Victoria everybody knew was well and truly down the gurgler. Their debt was \$18.8 billion. Wow – what am I saying now? \$116 billion is where we are. But let us have a look at what that is in today's terms: that is \$35.8 billion. That is a third of what we have today, and we were so worried about where Victoria was going to end up because of the financial debt mismanagement. I wonder very much if the same thing is going to happen. At that time the Cain government was mired in debt as well, and the Premier left the Parliament and put Joan Kirner in place. She had to deal with it. I wonder if the same thing is going to happen, but I am not sure whether we are going to have the member for Bendigo East as the next Premier or the member for Niddrie,

because I understand there is a little bit of argy-bargy about who it is going to be. We might have one anointed by the Premier, but –

Brad Rowswell: Calculator at the ready, happy to do the numbers.

Cindy McLEISH: Absolutely. We know the member for Niddrie is out there. We know he is having a look at how that might go.

When we are having a look at this culture of waste and mismanagement, this is why we have the debt. It is not because we have been unlucky. We started from a bad position before COVID, before bushfires. We started from a pretty ordinary position, and it has just got worse. We know that waste is absolutely in the DNA of the Labor government. The projects so far are calculated at well over \$30 billion of waste and over-budget costs.

On top of that, we are the highest taxed state in the nation in Victoria – Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined. It is a pretty sad state. But not only that, we are spending \$10 million a day just to service our debt, and that means we cannot do other things that matter. I know Mansfield really need a new hospital, and that would take seven full days, \$70 million. That would work just nicely for them. I know there are so many other issues in my electorate – the roads. Gosh, wouldn't it be nice to have a good solid investment in roads, because I can tell you right now we do not have it. And I will tell you also who is making all the money. It is Tyrepower and all the tyre repair places. Driver after driver is having to head into these businesses because their tires have popped. I have spoken to Tyrepower in Benalla, Croydon and Seymour and the dealership that do it in Healesville. They are all saying they have people constantly coming in because the government does not have enough money to invest in the state's roads.

I am just going to touch for a moment on small businesses, because they are doing it tough as well. We see that they do not get much help from this state Labor government. We had a federal budget the other day, and Jim Chalmers got up there and he talked about 'Isn't it fabulous, you're going to have a \$650 bill relief in small business.' We are not sure if it is really an energy relief payment or a bit of a rebate from the way it is being done, but he said, 'Isn't this great for small business.' Let us have a look at the energy.gov.au website on the Energy Bill Relief Fund for small business. How much can you get? It depends where you are, because you will get \$650 of bill relief if your eligible small business is in these states and territories: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Guess who is not there? Victoria is not there –

Brad Rowswell: There's nothing for Victoria?

Cindy McLEISH: Nothing for Victoria. We have the Minister for Energy and Resources banging on and saying everybody gets that \$250 at home. Let me tell you, the small business owner has a home. They have got the heater on at home and they have got the air conditioner on at home and they are trying to run a business – they are trying to employ people. It might be a retailer, it might be somebody in the tourism sector – a whole host of areas. They are trying to run their business and they need to use energy to do so, so they have been shafted by this government. It seems that every other government around the country can match it, but not Victoria.

Again we have to have a look at why Victoria cannot match it. It is because we have got this massive debt and we cannot afford it. We cannot afford it because the government cannot get its finances in order. Their financial acumen is very, very poor. In fact I think it is pretty well missing. We know what they are good at. They are good at waste – that is part of their DNA. I have said that before. But we have pretty well got, I would say, a state of financial emergency in Victoria. We have a rental crisis. People are trying to pay bills. They are trying to keep their car on the road and fix those popped tyres that are happening, if you are in the bush, all of the time. They are trying to get on with their lives and they are finding inflation is running very quickly, moving quicker than the government certainly would like. They are being sluggish every which way.

Since the Andrews Labor government was elected nine years ago, Victoria's tax take is set to double, and it is going to increase by another 14 per cent over the next three years. So I think what the Shadow Treasurer has put down before us today, a matter of public importance, is in fact extremely important. It is important for every single one of us – every person who contributes to society, every family, every child at school that might miss out because the government cannot get enough mental health practitioners in schools because we are having workforce issues. We have got agencies reaping the rewards, not the agency staff reaping rewards. There are so many issues, and this government is not onto them.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:22): I would say it is a pleasure to rise and speak on the matter of public importance (MPI) of the opposition, but it is a bit of cheap politics here from the member for Sandringham. It is that cheap politics that we saw leading into the 2022 campaign, and it feels like a re-run, like a really poor sitcom – or maybe, as the member for Bulleen said, 'You know they got it wrong', and it is the internal leaks rather than this issue that has already been played out with Victorians over and over and over again. We saw the debt, we saw the deficit conversation that was had and Victorians saw through a cheap six dot point shopping list here. They saw through that because Victorians realised what journey we had been on with the impact of the pandemic, with impacts on –

Cindy McLeish: Weren't you listening to me?

Tim RICHARDSON: Yes, I did listen, and I tell you what it was a struggle, member for Eildon. We did listen. I dug deep. It is like me running 5 kilometres: I have just got to keep telling myself to go, and it was like 'Just listen'. But I did hear your contribution, which was well out of the realms of reasonable. But you had a crack. Good on you.

The reality of this MPI is that Victorians have seen through the cheap politics of those opposite. When we consider the journey that our state has been on and the impacts of the pandemic and the costs, it is quite extraordinary. When we saw federal debt come up, two-thirds was before the pandemic and one-third was attributed to the pandemic, and we did not see any one of those opposite at all talk about that, especially not the hero of the member for Kew, Josh Frydenberg. What did Josh say when there was the COVID recovery budget? 'The more debt and deficit is the price on saving livelihoods.' That is what the federal Treasurer at the time Josh Frydenberg, the hero of the member for Kew and so many others, was on the record as saying with record debt going towards \$1 trillion. Then there was a great deal of uncertainty, and the health crisis had such a severe economic impact.

A member interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: That is right. We agreed, and that is what Victorians experienced during that time. We had an unprecedented one-in-100-year pandemic, and it required Victorians to wilfully go into debt to support our economy, to support jobs and to support the health and wellbeing of Victorians. That is the absence in the story of debt that those opposite have not confronted. When we were confronting the challenges and the economic crisis, those opposite were tearing down health messages, wearing silly masks, sledging people, as the member for Brighton would say, and undermining the economic reforms and impacts that we were having. What it says is that they would not have taken the action. They would have sent our economy spiralling even further. It would not have been the V-shaped recovery that we saw, it would have been U-shaped or worse. It would have flattened out and caused generations of disadvantage and economic impact. But we reached in, and as the Treasurer said at the COVID budget hearings when I was a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, we made that decision and we knew that we would have to come back in years to come and fix that.

There has been a lot said about infrastructure. There is a Liberal hero that those opposite love to refer to time and time again, the most successful Liberal leader certainly in recent times. 'Who is that?' they say. The member for Brighton is going, 'Hang on, it wasn't me. I'm not the leader yet.' The member

for Kew did a much better job than the member for Sandringham. I think the member for Kew might be getting the next MPI, but that is okay. But who is it? Who is the person that said those immortal words? With a building boom in new infrastructure on Australia's east coast pitting states against each other, this Premier said, 'It's okay if costs are increased from estimates at the start of projects.' Who was it? Who said that comment? Who do they refer to time and time again as the gold standard for economic reform and jobs? 'We all want to go back to colonial times and have just one big state – New South Wales.' Premier Dom Perrottet. Remember those opposite: 'Oh, we've got to be more like Dom. Oh, we've got to be more like Gladys. Come on, Dan.' Well, it was Dom Perrottet that said that it can increase from that time.

James Newbury interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: It's not all about you, member for Brighton. I know it is the tutu, look-at-me episode and you get your time on camera. I mean, rumour has it you are the fastest to request broadcasting and get video footage in this Parliament's history. 'Can I get the video footage? I've got to see myself.' Rumour has it he is in the lead on that.

But Premier Perrottet went on to say, 'These increases are not unique to New South Wales. It's happening right across the eastern seaboard.' Last time I checked that includes Victoria, so we are on a unity ticket there with the most successful Liberal government in recent memory in the nation, the Perrottet–Berejiklian–Baird–O'Farrell government. There were a few, but it was the most successful Liberal government. But then what did Premier Perrottet go on to say?

We have a duty to make sure we get our projects built that are value for taxpayers, but ultimately, we've got to keep going.

And that is exactly right. We are not immune to some of those impacts and those issues, so it is cheap politics to come in here and re-run a 2022 campaign narrative that failed so spectacularly. We have never seen the primary of the Liberals this low in living memory. This is because you cannot come in with six dot points that you have practised in front of the mirror for 15 minutes as your contribution and think that is enough. Victorians are onto this. They know the choices that were made, and those were difficult choices made under duress. They knew that there would be a debt impact and we would have to pay it back. That is why we have established the Victorian Future Fund to help pay down the pandemic debt, and every dollar put into this fund and every dollar of earnings will be quarantined and used to repay those borrowings. Those are the responsible decisions. We had an impact and we responded to that.

For those opposite to come in here and do the cheap politics and the shopping lists and the same dot points that we hear over and over again – I mean, dig deep. Listen to your former leader the member for Bulleen and learn the lesson that it was about the leaks and dishonesty with the Victorian people. That is what it was about. It was the undermining; it was the poor narrative. You lost your way. Come in here and have a sensible debate.

Those in the northern state that had the most successful government in recent history for the Liberals acknowledged that we had to go into debt. One of the heroes of the member for Kew, Josh Frydenberg, made that point over and over and over in 2020 and 2021: 'It's okay to have a trillion-dollar debt.' Imagine if you applied the narratives of the member for Kew and the standard that has been set by the member for Sandringham today on their heroes. They could not find him a seat. He could not go back in through Aston; that would have been a disaster. But that is where we are at the moment, and that is an important point when we are the engine room. The member for Sandringham goes, 'Well, we should just keep creating jobs.' Hello – 460,000 jobs since September 2020. We are the engine room of the nation's economy. Half of the jobs in Victoria from before the pandemic have been recreated in our state. We have the tools and the energy and the purpose, with our people in Victoria and the investment attraction that we take in, to really surge through in the years to come. The aspiration and hope in Victoria are substantial.

Those opposite can talk down the Victorian economy; they can talk down jobs. I mean, I thought I was having a laugh here. I thought, no, the glasses are playing up: 3.6 to 4.5 per cent by 2025 – that is what they are talking about for the unemployment rate. I thought, ‘Goodness me, the member for Sandringham must have fallen out with the member for Malvern’, because what did he preside over – a 6.7 per cent unemployment rate. I thought, that is a bit cheeky. I know they were close before, and they were part of the 18 or 19 team. I am not sure of the 11 – we are not quite sure. But I thought that is an extraordinary number to draw attention to how successful the Victorian economy has been post when the Liberals had that blip of four years where they did not do anything. They come in here and say, ‘Oh, we’re better economic managers. We can run projects better.’ Are they going to get on the shovel, like we have seen Dom Perrottet, saying that this is the economic impact? Are they better economic managers? They did not build anything during that time. They did not deliver a major infrastructure project during that time. In my community we have delivered major roads and level crossing removals. The Suburban Rail Loop is not far away from being in the ground; Metro Tunnel is not far from being completed.

I thought, ‘Well, they keep coming up with this.’ Debt during the pandemic – the feds’ was two-thirds. One-third was during the pandemic, two-thirds was pre that budget, and I thought, ‘They keep making this mistake’, because the narrative is so contradictory they are going to be found out between what their federal counterparts did, where the whole nation’s economy was and where the New South Wales example was. I thought I had better simplify it; I had better draw it back. So two-thirds of the debt before we came into the pandemic was federal. That is like 19 or 18 numbers out of 30. Then on the other side was one-third. One-third of that was related to the pandemic. That is like having 11 numbers out of 30. Just to give them a sense, they had those numbers recently during that leadership shemozzle: there were 19 that barely had confidence in the Leader of the Opposition and then 11 that cannot stand him and just want him gone. That is the level. That is the narrative around a two-thirds and a one-third majority, because Victorians understand that difference, and that is why they resoundingly voted for an Andrews Labor government to continue to get on with delivering for all Victorians. That is why this MPI is an absolute shambles.

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (17:33): I rise to speak on behalf of the Greens to this matter of public importance put forward by the member for Sandringham. There has been a lot of talk in this debate about debt and deficit, but why has no-one mentioned or brought up the real impacts of the social and environmental deficit that people are currently facing right across Victoria? Just look at homelessness rates: over 30,000 people experiencing homelessness in Victoria every single night. That is an increase of around 24 per cent since the last census, well above the 5 per cent increase nationally. You have got up to about 120,000 people, including children, on the public housing waiting list. It is going up, and it has gone up almost every year since this government has been in office. You have got young people who are experiencing mental ill health waiting six to 12 months to access the care that they need. You have got people on the public dental waiting list waiting on average 16 months for dental treatment. You have got the cost of living skyrocketing, with people needing emergency relief, food and material aid. You have got community service organisations struggling, unable to keep up with demand. You have got workers experiencing the biggest real wage cut on record. You have got our ecosystems on the brink of collapse, the number of threatened species continuing to rise – over 2000 plants and animals under threat. This is the real debt and deficit that we are facing here in Victoria, and it comes at a time when we have already got, in Victoria, below the national average funding for public education, below the national average funding for public hospitals and below the national average funding for public housing. This is data from the Productivity Commission.

Let us talk about young people, who are being left behind and facing the prospect of being a generation that is worse off than the one that came before them. It is harder to afford a house, harder to get a secure well-paying job, harder to get by and easier to find yourself in poverty or homeless if things do not go right, and of course they are facing the impending climate crisis. These are all political choices, and the idea that people in need and our environment can afford the austerity budget that is coming up

that cuts funding to services and programs and that cuts jobs is just ridiculous. When I made my first speech in this place, I said –

A member: Was it as memorable as this one?

Sam HIBBINS: Well, mate, you should listen. I said that in the good times we must move away –

Members interjecting.

Sam HIBBINS: As I was just saying, you should listen to this. Obviously you were not listening to my first speech in 2014, because you might have taken a different direction, or maybe you did listen and you chose a different direction.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Prahran that ‘you’ refers to the Chair.

Sam HIBBINS: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. We must move away from the boom–bust cycle of governing, where in the good times the chequebook opens and in bad times the red pen comes out and rules a line through programs and infrastructure that people depend on.

Pre election the state government did not tell anyone that this was going to be a slash-and-burn budget, their first budget coming up. In fact when they released their *Labor’s Financial Statement 2022*, as I outlined during question time, they said their promises were fully funded and fully costed. They said that and made points about cuts and closures. They said:

... Matthew Guy’s Liberals want to try to cut and close and call it good management ...

They said:

“Matthew Guy’s Liberals’ plan for cuts and closures would not only hurt Victorians’ jobs and livelihoods – it would put our state’s entire economic recovery at risk.”

They said:

“Our election promises are fully-funded ... without privatising, increasing net debt or introducing new taxes.”

They were providing themselves with an economic straitjacket. They are not the first government to do this. I think we recall when the Liberals were elected in 2010 promising no increase in taxes, no increase in debt and no cuts to public sector workers. Well, of course when they were in government there was next to nothing when it came to infrastructure, they cut public sector jobs and promised a massive pay rise for teachers – the best paid in the country they said they were going to be. That did not happen. And they did end up having to break the fiscal straitjacket that they set for themselves. But why do governments seem to feel that they can just make these promises prior to the election and in the first budget after completely break them – in this budget? Why is it that public sector workers should cop it when they have got to break these promises? Why is it people in need that cop it when they have got to break these promises? And what is coming up? If the budget is what has been foreshadowed, it is going to be exactly what the Liberals did in their time in office.

In terms of economic management, I will just make a couple of points. In terms of infrastructure and debt, of course we should be borrowing to build, and certainly that was something the Greens very much supported and very much encouraged. We should be using public debt to fund infrastructure. But where this government has erred is that it cannot just be a case of ‘Well, the other mob didn’t build, so we’ll just build.’ The frameworks in terms of what you were exactly investing in – there were none. For example, the North East Link, something I have raised in this house, started at \$10 billion, went to \$16 billion and is probably going to be more than that. That is going to put 100,000 cars on the road. We have now got the Suburban Rail Loop at many billions of dollars. When they were first promoting that, that was going to take 100,000 cars off the road. So you are spending \$18 billion to put the cars on the road and how many billions to take them off the road? Why don’t you just take them off the road in the first place? We have got billions of dollars being spent on jails for these tough-on-crime policies. Now the jails are sitting empty. Then we have got the addiction to sweetheart deals

and public-private partnerships that are no doubt going to come back to bite the government, and there have been very generous deals.

There is a clear pathway for this government, and every decision needs to put people in need and the environment at its heart. It is always people that miss out when governments need to make so-called 'tough decisions'. They need to be raising revenue from profiteering corporations like the big banks, property developers and the gambling industry. The big banks are on track to raise \$33 billion of profit this year – record profits at a time when people are struggling and Victorians are struggling with the cost of living. These banks are too big to fail and they are given effectively a subsidy by the government, so a levy is an absolutely fair return and a fair level of taxation that could deliver billions of dollars of revenue here in Victoria.

And what could that pay for? What do we need: more affordable and public housing here in Victoria, direct investment in building public housing – not some sort of convoluted privatisation deal but actual direct investment in public housing. We need much higher wages for public sector workers. We had one of the harshest wage caps here in Victoria. It has gone up to now 3 per cent; they should abolish it. We need more free GPs, dentists and psychologists. The waiting lists for people needing dental care or needing mental health care or even to see an affordable GP – we have got the community health sector crying out for more funding to be able to deliver these services, and this government is cutting funding to them. And then we need dedicated funding to end extinction. The Parliamentary inquiry into extinction last year showed it was very clear: to reverse the decline in species here in Victoria needs dedicated funding.

I have got to mention in the time that I have got left, in regard to housing, it is extraordinary that today the Labor Party teamed up with Moira Deeming on the crossbench in the other place to vote down an inquiry into the rental crisis. This is a government whose current housing policies include no rent freeze, no ongoing rent caps, a weak vacancy tax, no social housing levy, privatised public housing land, no regulation of short stay and no reform to stamp duty. This is a government that do not want an inquiry into the rental crisis because they do not want to listen to renters who are struggling.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:42): I am very pleased to join my colleagues on this side of the house to talk about the member for Sandringham's shocking, yet not surprising, matter of public importance that has been put forward to this house today. It might be the end of the day, but there are two things that have really stuck with me after listening to the debate in this house today, and I have been sitting here for many, many hours today listening to both sides of the house. The first thing I want to say is that, as someone who was not born and bred in Victoria, this is an amazing state. I love Victoria. I feel very, very optimistic about her future, and I feel very optimistic and have faith in the Victorian people, their spirit and their resilience. We saw that on display for two very difficult and long years during a one-in-100-year pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an amazing state. I listen to those opposite and certainly as it comes to the end of the day I quite often wonder why they are still sitting here and living here in this state. Victorians that would be listening to your contributions today would also be wondering why you bother staying here if it is constant doom and gloom. Your lack of belief in Victorians and progress and the future that this state has is truly, truly depressing.

The second thing I would like to say, and I know the member for Gippsland South will love this: those opposite stand for two things, and these are two things that my community talked to me about in 2018 and 2022 – you are all looking at me like there is going to be some surprise, and I promise you there is no surprise – cuts and closure. That is absolutely what you stand for. Time and time again you have sat in this place talking about not wanting to see investment in infrastructure in this state. Victorians in this state and most certainly in Melbourne's western suburbs know, because we are sitting in one of the largest growth corridors in this state, in this country, that we need to get on and we need to invest in the services and, most importantly, build the infrastructure that we need in Victoria today and will need in the decades to come, because it is no surprise that in decades to come we will have the largest population in the country here in Victoria and surpass Sydney and New South Wales.

Cuts and closures: I feel like we will be going to an election in 3½ years and that will again be something when I am on my feet out on the hustings – not having to talk about it, mind you. I do not need to go and talk to people about cuts and closures. That is what those opposite stand for and the Liberal Party has always stood for – no surprises there. I know the member for Sandringham tried to talk about what is in the DNA of this side of the house. Well, the DNA of that side of the house is cuts and closures every single time. You have learned nothing in eight years, and I have no doubt that in 3½ years you will not have learned anything else. I also feel like for the first time in eight years –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, you have picked up previous speakers on the issue of using the term 'you', which refers to the Chair. I ask you to ensure that the member is referring to members correctly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, yes, I have, and I do try and allow some context when that is used. I would remind all members that 'you' refers to the Chair.

Emma Kealy: Just be straight.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am straight on that one, thank you very much, member for Lowan. I remind all members that 'you' refers to the Chair and reflecting on the Chair is out of order.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Just for clarity, when I talk about 'you' I am meaning those MPs on the opposite side of the house and I am talking about the Liberal–National parties.

There is also something that has stuck with me today. I have been sitting here for four years, and we have been eight years in government. I am sure if someone – it is a shame there are no journo's in the gallery – went back and checked *Hansard*, there would be two words that have been used today, and I am not talking about cuts and closures, more times in this house, in this place, than in the eight years that we have been in government, and that is 'federal government'. It is almost like those opposite have realised there is another level of government, and in the very, very brief time that the Albanese federal Labor government has been in power, they are suddenly somehow interested in the contributions and the co-funding that comes towards Victoria. Not once in the four years that I have sat here have you ever, ever talked about the lack of funding to this state from your counterparts, your mates in Canberra.

What has struck me as most shocking is that even during the COVID-19 pandemic – when the former coalition Prime Minister forgot to order vaccines and then when the vaccines came into the country sent those vaccines to New South Wales, not Victoria – not one of those sitting opposite ever mentioned the federal government and the lack of funding, the lack of support for Victorians. Even though the former federal Treasurer, the former member for Kooyong, seemed occasionally happy to tell people he was from Victoria, he never actually stood for Victorians. He never fought for the vaccines, he never sent any of that funding to this state, so it is absolutely ludicrous that today we have heard more about the federal government from those opposite than they ever mentioned in the decade that we almost had under the former coalition federal government.

Time and time again on this side of the house, and certainly during the two years of the COVID pandemic, we have spoken rationally about the importance of using our balance sheet to protect the wellbeing of Victorians, of all Victorians. It was no surprise to anyone on this side of the house what those opposite did. Time and time again they questioned the science while listening to the health experts and, very sadly, continued to cavort with conspiracy theorists to undermine the state's health response. Undermining our state's health response was some of the most shameful behaviour that I think I have ever seen on display by any political party and indeed here in this place. And now to sit here and listen to those opposite try and talk about debt and spending as though that money did not contribute to us surviving the COVID pandemic or getting on with what is factually the biggest build of infrastructure in the history of Victoria – I mean, come on, let us get real.

When you talk about this state, we know that Victoria is a state where if you are looking for work, chances are this government will have created an entire industry or have a project underway that is looking for workers. This is a state where we can proudly stand up and say we are not only seeking workers but we will even help you get the skills that you need to get a job. In some cases, many cases, tens of thousands of cases, we will even pay for you to get the training and qualifications to do that job.

We talked about job creation, and I think it was the member for Frankston caught in *Hansard* when he asked those opposite how many jobs they created last time they were in government in this state. I want to reiterate that. That was 39,000 jobs compared to ours, which is hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thousands – very close to half a million – jobs, many of them well-paying jobs and, most importantly, secure jobs. Those are two words, ‘secure jobs’, that those sitting on that side of the house never seem to mention. I am sure that one could be a *Hansard* fact check: how many times they have mentioned secure jobs or permanent jobs.

A member: This will be great next week after the budget comes out.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I am very much looking forward to the budget next week in fact. I think it will be a responsible budget, just as the federal one that was handed down was. I cannot wait to hear the contributions from this side of the house and then listen to the vitriol and the negativity from that side of the house when it comes to talking about the budget that the Treasurer will hand down in this place next week.

There is one thing for sure, I would say to the member for Sandringham, that sits in the DNA of the Andrews Labor government, and indeed Labor members right across this state and across this country, and that is that we are a government that is passionate about getting on and delivering the infrastructure and the services that every Victorian needs now and into the future.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:52): I will be very interested to read the budget and have a look at the cuts in it when it is handed down next week and to reply to that. We have also been told that we are negative on this side. I am going to fill you in on some facts, particularly with regard to regional and rural Victoria. We are paying more and we are getting less. We know that. We have heard valuable contributions from the member for Sandringham and the member for Kew and an excellent contribution from my colleague the member for Gippsland South. We are not getting value for money from the Andrews Labor government, and in regional Victoria we are getting completely ripped off.

A quarter of all Victorians live in regional and rural Victoria, so you would think that 25 per cent of infrastructure spending – 25 per cent of any spending – should come to the regions. Seeing as a quarter of all Victorians live there, that would be practical. But it does not happen. We have heard a lot of talk about the economy and the state of it and a lot of bamboozling us with bollocks. That has been mentioned a few times in here today. \$10 million a day in interest could completely fix the Hattah–Robinvale Road, which apparently got \$10 million in funding a couple of years ago; we are yet to see it. A couple of potholes have been filled in, and then they get torn up as soon as the temperature hits 35 degrees, or 25 degrees in some cases. That is just on Monday. Then on Tuesday we could fix the Boort–Wycheproof Road and then on Wednesday we could completely fix the Donald–Murtoa Road. We could keep fixing roads and before the end of the financial year we could have an autobahn right around regional Victoria, perfect concrete roads.

I am going to use this contribution – the next 7, nearly 8 minutes – to tell you some stories about how this mismanaged economy affects people on the ground in regional Victoria, and these are facts. These come directly from my constituents. Once upon a time, living in the regions would cost you significantly less than it would to live in the city, and that just added to the sun-drenched lustre of living in the great north-west, the allure. Now it is simply not true. For one, our council rates are the highest in Victoria. Sometimes we are paying triple the council rates of an equivalent property in South Yarra, for example, but that is another story for another day.

I did hear one story today, actually, from a renter who told me that because we only have one natural gas supplier in Mildura – no competition in our part of the world – it is causing issues for those who can least afford it: those who need gas to heat their home, heat their water and cook. This particular person did not even use natural gas for cooking and did not even use natural gas for heating, but his bill, which comes every two months, is at least \$160 and getting more expensive. Now, \$160 to a lot of people in this place may not sound like a lot of money. Those who can least afford it, who are spending three-quarters of their wage on rent, cannot afford it. There is no competition, so therefore there is a monopoly in the market and they are taking advantage of customers and those who can least afford it.

The geographic isolation in towns in the Mallee and Sunraysia means that there is so much more added expense just to get around. This also impacts that ever-increasing cost of living, and it is really starting to hit hard. It takes you an hour or more to get to a medical appointment, sometimes a hair appointment. It depends where you live. It will take you an hour or more to get to services, sometimes to get to shopping, sometimes to get to grocery shopping, and that costs fuel. All of those other issues are if you are lucky enough to own a car, because there is no public transport. Forget about catching a bus. It is just not going to happen – let alone a train. Do not get me started on the train. That is just not going to happen. You need a car, and then, if you can get there without hitting a foot-deep pothole and having to fix your car afterwards, you have got no money left to put into your grocery bill anyway.

So we are the highest taxed state in the nation, with the highest amount of debt of any other state, and as the member for Gippsland South and the member for Kew have pointed out, is it any wonder we have a housing crisis? I wrote a column about this in our local paper last week. Land tax represents 16.6 per cent of the state's total tax revenue. I have regular calls to my office, legitimate calls, asking about this stamp duty figure that they have been quoted on the purchase of a new property. Sometimes it might be the generational hand-down of a farm they are taking over. The stamp duty they have to pay, land tax et cetera – we get genuine calls to my office asking if this is legitimate, wondering if it is a joke.

We have people that are irate about the windfall tax, as they should be. Some are actually begging for assistance. Those generational farmers that are taking over farms now are begging for assistance to help pay the outrageous stamp duty so that families can own their own home, and they have to. That is the dream. It is the only way they are going to be able to put a roof over their kids' heads, because rentals do not exist. It has become far too hard to be a landlord. This land tax has really hit many mum-and-dad investors, and the massive 25 per cent increase in land tax revenue this year will mean that rents will have to increase yet again for Victorians who already use three-quarters of their weekly wage on rent. In fact I have heard from some people asking, once they have paid that: how are they then supposed to send their kids to a public school? How are they supposed to eat?

Danny O'Brien: Most expensive in the country as well.

Jade BENHAM: Exactly, it is the most expensive in the country.

Here is another story. Yesterday we had a call from a mum, and she was desperate. This mum Megan's beautiful two-year-old girl Octavia desperately needs an operation – desperately. It cannot be done in Mildura for reasons we will get into later. The list on the next closest option, which is Swan Hill for an ENT, is far too long. That public list is far too long for Octavia to wait on – far too long. Octavia, at two years old, is now extremely underweight at just 11 kilograms and is struggling to breathe and eat every day. Can you imagine watching your little girl suffer like that when the solution is actually pretty simple – she just needs surgery. She cannot get it. She cannot get it because her surgeon has said they cannot do it locally, the list is too long at the next option and Megan does not have five grand lying around to pay for a private operation. Who does have five grand lying around these days, when three-quarters of your wage is going to rent?

Danny O'Brien: The human face of the waiting list.

Jade BENHAM: The human face of the waiting list. No-one can afford that. She has actually been advised to access her super to get this operation for her two-year-old who cannot breathe and who cannot eat. She cannot get emergency surgery. It has been looked into. The only option at this point is to go private, and she cannot afford it. These are the issues that cross the sectors and the departments. They run deep, and the human cost is too high; it is very real.

Over the next three years Labor's tax take will increase by 14 per cent. All of these contributors mean the ends – those ends that we just try and meet every day – are getting further and further away, much less ever being met for everyday Victorians. Unlike the government members on the other side, my colleagues and I are very in touch with our communities. We are talking to them every day, very in touch, which is why we have got stories like this, and we get them every single day. I am here to speak up for them. Those beyond the freeways in actual regional and rural – beautiful rural – Victoria have endorsed the Nationals, with our new members that are here today, as those that are most in touch, and we are saying enough is enough. Victorians do not get value for money from the Andrews Labor government, and in regional Victoria we are getting completely ripped off.

Motions

Safe Schools

Debate resumed.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (18:03): I move:

That debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Announcements

Victorian Parliamentary Former Members Association

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (18:03): I have received a message from the Legislative Council informing the Legislative Assembly that they have agreed to the following resolution:

That this house recognises the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members Association Incorporated (the Association) as the representative body of, and advocate for, former members of the Victorian Parliament, and –

- (1) acknowledges the contribution made by the association and its members to supporting former members of Parliament and improving their post-parliamentary welfare;
- (2) welcomes the role of the association in encouraging former members to maintain the contacts, associations and friendships established during their tenure as members of the Victorian Parliament;
- (3) endorses the role of the association in establishing relationships with kindred organisations within Australia and internationally;
- (4) recognises the association as a principal stakeholder, and advisor, in the development of welfare and post-parliamentary career programs for members of the Victorian Parliament and endorses the relationship that has been established between the Parliament of Victoria and the association on all matters affecting former members of Parliament.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (18:04): I move, by leave:

That this house supports the resolution of the Legislative Council recognising the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members Association Incorporated as the representative body of and advocate for former members of the Victorian Parliament.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Gambling Taxation Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (18:05): I am really pleased to rise today to speak on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, which is the fourth and final legislative instrument required to implement and respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence. This has been an enormous undertaking, and I thank the Treasurer for his part in holding the casino operator to account and ensuring that the reprehensible behaviour uncovered by the royal commission never happens again.

To say this government has acted swiftly to deliver the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence is an understatement. Whilst there is more to do to hold the casino to the highest possible standard, I am proud of this government's progress. When this bill becomes law, 33 out of the 33 recommendations of the royal commission will either be fully implemented or legislated for and awaiting commencement. At the end of the year some of the strongest harm-reduction and anti-money-laundering measures ever implemented will be in place at Crown Melbourne. This includes key recommendations of the royal commission, such as mandatory precommitment via carded play on each and every gaming machine in the casino. This is not only a jurisdictional first but world-leading in its response to both gambling harm and money laundering.

Before I get to the substance of this bill and the important reasons why the government is bringing the casino tax under the framework of the Taxation Administration Act 1997, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the findings of the royal commission and the actions that we have taken as a government to address them. Firstly, the royal commission found that Crown Melbourne was unsuitable to hold the Melbourne casino licence as it had engaged in conduct that was illegal, dishonest, unethical and exploitative but that the immediate cancellation of Crown's licence would cause considerable harm to the Victorian economy and innocent third parties. Approximately 12,000 jobs were at stake.

As a Labor government, our pathway forward was clear. We acted immediately to protect Victorians from the predatory behaviour of the casino and to ensure that the employees of the casino were taken care of under the stringent oversight of the special manager. We recognised that it was our responsibility to ensure that the casino be held to the highest standard of integrity and oversight in order to minimise gambling harm. We decided not only to accept the findings of the royal commission but to in fact go further. The government accepted the royal commission's findings and acted decisively, delivering nine priority recommendations through the Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Act 2021, which established the special manager to oversee and monitor the casino. It had unprecedented powers to oversee Crown, including the power to direct the board, and unfettered access to the casino, its books and its records. This type of corporate oversight has never been seen before in Australian corporate history. We also established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, the VGCCC, as the new regulator.

We went beyond the royal commission's recommendations in three key aspects. Firstly, we provided for the automatic cancellation of Crown Melbourne's licence at the end of the period of the special manager's oversight unless the VGCCC is clearly satisfied Crown is suitable to continue to operate the Melbourne casino. We fully repealed the sweetheart deal struck by those opposite that prevented the state from making regulatory changes to reform the casino's operation without incurring a liability to pay compensation to Crown Melbourne, and we increased the maximum fine the regulator can impose on Crown for a disciplinary action from \$1 million to \$100 million.

Shortly thereafter we passed the Casino and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act 2022, which strengthened the powers and functions of inspectors, embedded harm minimisation in the core functions and objectives of the VGCCC, expanded grounds for disciplinary action and completed the transition to the VGCCC. The VGCCC, I have got to say, has demonstrated fearless resolve when it comes to holding the industry to account based on its core principles of integrity, safety and fairness. Their record already speaks for itself. It includes \$230 million of fines against Crown alone, comprised of two fines totalling \$120 million for breaches of the code of conduct for the responsible service of gambling by failing to intervene to prevent gambling harm by allowing customers to gamble for long periods without a break and for failing to comply with the direction of the regulator to take steps to prevent patrons from simulating automatic play when gambling on electronic gaming machines. There was an \$80 million fine for allowing patrons to use credit or debit cards to access funds to gamble, from which Crown derived an estimated revenue of more than \$32 million. Another \$30 million fine was for allowing Crown patrons to use blank cheques to gamble in the casino.

We delivered on 12 more recommendations to prevent money laundering at the casino, minimise gambling-related harm and strengthen corporate ownership and governance arrangements with the passage of the Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill 2022. These new laws will make carded play compulsory on all gaming machines and table games at the casino, allowing people to easily keep track of their spending and set fully binding limits for time and money. The use of cash at the casino will be limited to \$1000 per 24 hours. Mandatory precommitment, as I mentioned, will come into effect across the casino. All gambling activity must be tracked, and cash will be limited to \$1000 per 24 hours for pokies and table games.

This bill, the Gambling Taxation Bill, addresses the royal commission's determination that Crown Melbourne improperly claimed deductions of its calculations of casino tax payable to the state – or, simply put, they cheated on their taxes. The Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence recommended that casino tax be brought under the administrative framework of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 because of the unusual situation that there is no other financial consequence if casino tax is not paid, even if it is intentionally not paid. Bringing the casino's taxes under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 will subject it to the extensive provisions dealing with the collection of tax, including the imposition of penalty tax and interest on tax defaults and provisions for record keeping, enabling a tax liability to be properly assessed.

The Taxation Administration Act also creates several criminal offences, including for giving false or misleading information to tax officers, for deliberately omitting information to a tax officer and for tax evasion. These penalties are significant and may apply to a body corporate taxpayer and its officers. Transferring the casino tax provisions to a dedicated gambling taxation act which is subject to the Taxation Administration Act will align the legal framework and the administration of the casino taxes with other major state taxes. Further, this bill will align the tax rate for Crown's electronic gaming machines to match rates applying to club venue operators. This will see Crown pay its fair share of gambling taxes. Again, I would like to thank the Treasurer for his carriage of this bill which responds to the recommendations of the royal commission and acquits the final recommendation from that important work that was carried out.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (18:14): I am pleased to rise and get the jump on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023 and speak a little bit about this piece of legislation, which is effectively the second tranche of legislation in relation to the racing industry and betting and gaming arrangements that we have had this week but also has some significant changes, as the minister just outlined, to the casino taxation arrangements – the final tranche of the recommendations coming from the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence headed by Ray Finkelstein.

I think it is important to just go back to that a little bit. The royal commission actually came about as a result of the Bergin inquiry in New South Wales, which found out more about what was going on in Victoria than the former Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, the regulator here in this state, under the watch of the current Labor government, where the casino had been

engaging in incredibly bad behaviour. Indeed I will quote from the royal commission. Commissioner Finkelstein actually said:

... for many years Crown Melbourne had engaged in conduct that is, in a word, disgraceful. This is a convenient shorthand for describing conduct that was variously illegal, dishonest, unethical and exploitative.

So when the minister talks about cosy deals done with this side of Parliament, we can refer to what was going on at the casino under the supposed watch of the current Andrews Labor government. It took a New South Wales inquiry for the information to come to light about what was actually going on at the casino. So it is a bit disingenuous for the minister to talk about what happened in the 1990s when the Kennett government inherited, of course, the decision to introduce a casino from the Kirner government, when in fact there was so much, in the words of Commissioner Finkelstein, 'illegal, dishonest, unethical and exploitative' action going on by the casino under this government's watch.

I think we have had three previous tranches of legislation to implement the royal commission's recommendations. This bill implements the final recommendation, which does a couple of things. Basically it introduces new casino taxation arrangements so that, rather than being administered by the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, the casino's tax will now be under the purview of the commissioner of state revenue, so the State Revenue Office. It also introduces an increase in the casino tax. The gaming machine tax on electronic gaming machines operated by Crown will be increased so the taxation rate will be the same as EGMs operated by club venues. It is interesting to note, of course, in the context of the matter of public importance debate we have just had on the government's mismanagement of the economy and the budget, that this will net the government an expected \$30 million additional revenue a year. It is small change, given the size of the deficit and debt that we have got in this state, but every little bit helps, as I am sure the Treasurer is saying. I certainly do not disagree with the move to increase that tax on the casino's EGMs.

There are some technical changes as well, with the casino taxation arrangements being extended to apply under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and the consolidation of some of the other various gambling taxes. That is agreed, I think, by most. I certainly thank my colleagues the member for Sandringham and the member for Gippsland East. We have all coordinated the opposition's response on these two bills, given the interrelationship between them. Certainly the member for Sandringham has coverage of this legislation as the Shadow Treasurer, but it really is largely a casino and gaming bill. Not surprisingly, that is why the minister has spoken so early in the piece for the government members as well.

The other part of it that I touched on is the increase in the point-of-consumption tax (POCT). When I say this is part of a double act this week in Parliament, it really is the second part of the changes for the racing industry here in Victoria. This bill will increase the point-of-consumption tax from 10 per cent to 15 per cent. I am sure the minister at the table, the Minister for Racing, is pretty stoked about that. He has had a win for his sector, because they are pretty happy; I am not sure that he is going to get Christmas cards from various of his colleagues. This is an increase effectively to offset the expected loss of revenue that will come from the wagering and betting licence, which was the subject of the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 that we debated yesterday. That obviously has changed in the context of the increase in corporate bookies and online gambling – the fact that Victoria no longer has the ability, effectively, to operate a monopoly wagering and betting licence to the extent that it once did under the old TAB. There is much competition for the punter's dollar, and that means that the joint venture as it has been up until now between Tabcorp and the Victorian racing industry is not likely to be as lucrative as it was even at the last iteration of the licence issued in 2011.

What the government is proposing here – and what the Minister for Racing is grinning about like a Cheshire cat – is an increase in the point-of-consumption tax to offset that, with an agreement between the government and the industry that 4 per cent of that 5 per cent will go to the racing industry. Therefore in total, from the new rate of 15 per cent point-of-consumption tax, 7.5 per cent will go to the racing industry. That is estimated by the Department of Treasury and Finance to deliver, I think,

an annual figure in the next three or four years of about \$119 million to \$120 million, subject of course to turnover, but that will give the industry some certainty. I know the member for Sandringham and the member for Gippsland East – like, I am sure, the government – have made it pretty clear that is a good deal for the industry, and it should not be coming back to the taxpayer for support. It is important for the industry to make sure that it grows its own revenues and does its best to deliver a solid future on the back of these arrangements now being put in place by the government.

Whilst 1 per cent of the tax is going to the Treasurer – he will be trousering that, but it is to the people of Victoria – we suspect that that 1 per cent may end up going back to the industry as well given that the government has a secret MOU with the industry.

Anthony Carbines interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: You can laugh, Minister for Racing, but it is secret because no-one has seen it other than the government and the industry. I am sure there is nothing nefarious in it – I am sure – but a bit of transparency might be nice. We understand that that MOU guarantees about 90 per cent of the previous funding that the industry received to the industry going forward, and so it may well be, subject to what the government does with the licence, that that money will also end up going to the industry.

I just want to touch briefly on the issue that I raised yesterday with respect to the licence, which is absolutely relevant to the increase in the POCT, and that is that the government still has not addressed the issue of the intellectual property currently held by the joint venture in Tabcorp. This consists of thousands and thousands of customers in a database who are customers of the current joint venture. There is debate. Certainly those seeking to win the tender for the new licence believe that should be made available to them, and if it is, that will no doubt go to make the licence much more valuable. I invited the Minister for Racing at the table, who followed me in speaking yesterday, to give some clarity on the IP issue, and I note that he steadfastly avoided it – he did not want to go there.

We are not going to go there from this side because we do not have access to the government's legal advice as to what the intellectual property rights might be in this case, but we do believe that the government should be providing some clarity on that to the market. We have already seen one major bidder for the licence announce it is pulling out because it does not have any clarity on whether that IP is going to go with the licence, and there is the possibility that there will be no bidders. There have been rumours swirling around that a deal has already been done with Tabcorp and that it will simply get the licence rolled over. The government really should be explaining what is going on with the IP.

Anyway, this legislation sets up an opportunity for the racing industry and it implements some good measures on the casino. I look forward to the debate over the next couple of days.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (18:24): I really am pleased to talk on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023. In particular I just want to touch and recap on a couple of key elements of the bill: increasing the wagering and betting tax rate from 10 to 15 per cent from 1 July 2024 and the transfer of the administration of the casino tax from the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission to the commissioner of state revenue from 1 July 2023. There are some other elements, but I particularly want to stick to those that relate to the racing industry, as touched on by the previous speaker. Perhaps the key element that this bill does deliver on is vital long-term certainty to the Victorian racing industry. Why does that matter? When you have got a \$4.7 billion industry of economic development and economic return to the state – some 35,000 full-time jobs across the state – the Victorian racing industry is not only a pre-eminent jurisdiction here in Victoria but a critical industry that supports jobs and economic growth right across the state.

I want to draw, I suppose, a few different elements together. We did touch yesterday, as the previous speaker did, on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. The reason that was particularly important was because one of the elements was to remove the 'no less favourable' clause, which allows licences to be issued and negotiated on behalf of the government. But while it takes the

handbrake off around the ongoing funding arrangements for the racing industry, we have been able to address those matters in part through this bill, the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.

The only other elements that I did want to touch on and did not get a chance to yesterday are of course the matters that we went to yesterday when we were talking about the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. The matters in regard to the licences are under the purview of the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and I make it very clear that I will not be commenting on those matters. I will not be speaking to those matters, because naturally while the racing industry's funding in part historically and through the joint venture has come from that licence, the engagement in that process is for the gaming minister. That is appropriate, and she will address those matters in due course.

Bringing us back to the Gambling Taxation Bill, I think it is really important that we go to a couple of the key elements of what is important here to Racing Victoria, which issued a statement from the Victorian racing industry (VRI). We should talk about our key stakeholders. They make a significant contribution to leadership in the racing industry. On 2 May there was a statement from the Victorian racing industry on the Victorian point-of-consumption tax changes:

The Victorian Racing Industry (VRI), welcomes the Victorian Government's proposed changes to the Victorian Point of Consumption Tax ... arrangements which will result in an increase to the VRI's share of ongoing funding derived from the POCT collected, providing important long-term certainty for the VRI.

Now, as we know, wagering taxes are in line with other states. That is really important. We want to know that the racing industry has a framework to ensure its long term sustainability, and the way in which we do that is we increase, in this bill, the wagering and betting tax to 15 per cent from 10 per cent. That brings us into line with other states. To go back to the statement from the VRI, the racing industry, it states:

This increase will bring Victoria's POCT into line with New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania at 15% ...

Queensland of course is up at around 20 per cent.

The VRI welcomes the Victorian Government's ongoing commitment to the preservation of a growing and viable racing industry and Victoria's position as the pre-eminent racing and events jurisdiction in the country.

These are really critical changes that are outlined in this bill, and they go in tandem with the changes that we talked through in the amendment bill just yesterday.

On the work that has also been done, I want to just touch on the importance of the racing industry and why it has been critical. I want to thank our partners and our stakeholders on the work that has been done to reach an MOU with the industry – an MOU that makes very clear the government's guaranteed support over effectively the 10-year life of this MOU and the broader funding agreement – that provides certainty around the industry and its funding over the next decade. That is critical for the racing industry. I saw that evidence firsthand when I was at the Warrnambool races just recently, of the relief from the industry and participants, people who rely on our industry for their employment – as I said earlier, some 35,000 full-time jobs right across the state in so many industries. We saw that also when you have something like 14,000 people at the Warrnambool carnival, as we had just the other week.

In every town on the way to Warrnambool and beyond, down to Port Fairy and on the way back, everyone is clipping the ticket – every business, every accommodation, food and beverage outlets, clothes, fashion and the like – we have seen an absolute reliance on the Surf Coast, or in broad terms the South-West Coast. We saw a \$10 million economic impact and benefit across the South-West Coast from that carnival alone, with 7000 people on each of the first two days – 14,000 on Cup Day. These things make a big difference in regional communities, and we see the same when we come back down to Melbourne. We have seen that: a good example of the racing industry and the role that it plays in economic development in our community. The Spring Racing Carnival last year contributed over \$420 million to the Victorian economy, the single biggest economic contribution of any annual

sporting event in Australia, bigger than the grand prix, bigger than the Australian Open. The Spring Racing Carnival contributed \$420 million to the Victorian economy.

These matters are critical. We saw them again when I was with the member for Wendouree at Ballarat Turf Club just last week, where I was able to pick up on some colleagues' announcements in relation to the Minister for Industry and Innovation. I was also there with the member for Ripon. We were able to talk about how Jobs Victoria is partnering with the Ballarat Turf Club to deliver 100 roles at Ballarat-based stables and with Skillinvest to deliver a further 100 roles to regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne in the racing industry. We need to be able to find a labour force and make sure there are career pathways right across regional Victoria in the racing industry. Ballarat itself already sustains some 700 full-time jobs in the racing industry in Ballarat alone. That is really significant. The member for Cranbourne – we have spent a lot of time down there – understands and knows how many families in her electorate play a key and critical role at the Cranbourne racing club, one of the biggest training clubs in the state.

When you piece it all together in terms of the bills that we have been dealing with over the past couple of days, with the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 from yesterday we deal with the new licensing arrangements and removing the 'no less favourable' clause, but we are able to do that with the support of the industry by in part what we see in this bill before the house today, the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, where we lift the point-of-consumption tax to 15 per cent, bringing us into line with other states but also making sure that we lift the contribution that goes to the racing industry from the point-of-consumption tax up to 7.5 per cent of that 15 – half. The principle of that is very significant. Why shouldn't it be that the racing industry collects a financial benefit, funding and tax with which it then can generate income to continue to grow and sustain jobs, the industry and the product and its quality? Why not do that from its product? That is much more effective than taking those funds from other services that are vital in the Victorian community. So it generates a motivation as well for the racing industry to continue to offer quality services and a quality product with integrity, with the quality of the product across Victoria. What that also means is that wagering sustains itself and people feel confident engaging, as they do, in betting and wagering on the Victorian racing industry and its product. That is where the tax in a large part is generated from, and the revenue goes back to the industry that it is generating the tax from – a very significant industry in our state.

If I did not mention it earlier, I want to also touch on some of the very significant elements in regional Victoria, because I just think it cannot be lost on people – and I know it is very well understood by our regional MPs – that \$1.17 billion of that economic activity is generated in regional Victoria along with 9000 full-time equivalent jobs. It is not just those 9000 jobs but also the families that rely on those who work in our racing industry. We also see it through the Victorian government's \$72 million Victorian Racing Industry Fund. Of that fund a large portion is put towards capital and infrastructure projects. That is about upgrading our services and facilities around Victoria. That creates jobs for those workers in the construction industry in a particular sense but also so many community organisations that use those racing facilities for so many other events that are significant in their lives. Racing clubs are at the heart of communities. This bill goes a very long way to making sure that in the racing industry Victoria continues to be the pre-eminent jurisdiction and that it is well funded into the future.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (18:34): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, and as the member for Gippsland South pointed out, some elements of it relate to the casino tax arrangements. It is the elements that relate to the point-of-consumption tax that I wish to make my contribution on, as it is the revenue stream that funds a large component of our fantastic racing industry here in Victoria.

Now, I have sung the praises of this industry many, many times, and I will not fill in my 10 minutes like the minister did quoting a heap of statistics about the economic benefits of our racing industry to this great state because I have got them well on the record many, many times before. But I will say that this is an industry that should be celebrated and not dismantled, as MPs from some of the other parties would like to do – some sit up here and in the other place with a different colour of green on.

It is a great industry. We should look after it and we should nurture it. As the minister commented on in his contribution, you only had to be at Warrnambool 10 days ago – or two weeks ago – to see what an extraordinary contribution that makes to our community, and I just hope that we can get this bill through. I should say we will be not opposing this bill in the chamber but will be reserving our position on it in the upper house. We just hope that it can pass through with some common sense, without these amendments being raised by others.

Now, we do believe that the entire amount of the increase in the point-of-consumption tax should go to the racing industry because it is a tax on punters, and the fact that the government is clipping the ticket on the way through is certainly cause for some concern. I also want to mention that the reason for that is the great uncertainty that we have in relation to the wagering licence. I made this point yesterday that the industry has been quite lavish, I guess you could say, in its praise of this agreement – that 1 per cent or approximately \$30 million has been taken out of this 5 per cent increase to go into general revenue – and that the racing industry cannot really come knocking back on the door when that competition that has been going on for a couple of years with New South Wales takes its next step. And we just hope that those from over the border do not have another prize money increase. I think that nationwide or particularly in New South Wales and Victoria considerable amounts and improvements have been invested into the prize money of the racing industry, and we do not need to have that ongoing competition.

This will deliver on forecast an additional \$119 million per year to the sector – well, let us round it off and say \$120 million. And we certainly acknowledge – and this is the reason why we are not opposing in this chamber – that it gives the industry some certainty to move forward. But one point I want to make is when this government talks about 1 per cent going into general revenue and it talks about the 1 per cent going to hospitals and schools and roads, we should not be kidding ourselves on that. If there is any money left over after the licensing agreement, this will be going into servicing this \$30 billion in cost overruns we have, so this is why the government is clipping the ticket on the way through – not to put it into roads. It will go into that \$30 billion cost overrun or the \$10 million we are paying a day on interest. \$10 million a day – can you imagine that? \$10 million a day – it is just incredible that the state has got itself into that position. So it is laughable that we have people talking about how this money will be going back into roads and this money will be going back into hospitals. That will not be the case.

The other point that I just want to make is how we do not know where the wagering licence is going to end up. Because of the growth in corporate bookmakers and the drift of punters going from our tote over to corporate bookies, we are clearly not going to get the same level of return out of the licence or anywhere near it. So this 1 per cent or approximately \$30 million we are told – and the minister at the table just mentioned that there is an MOU that has been created, which we have not seen yet – that is going to top up the industry to 90 per cent of the previous level of supports that were there. Now, if we are not going to get as much for the licence this time around, I am sure this 1 per cent has been put aside by the Treasurer as insurance for if he has to top up the industry for the shortfall, dependent on what they get for the wagering licence. So with all this talk about this going to the people of Victoria and this talk about this going into roads and hospitals, we will be watching very closely where that ends up with the wagering licence and whether it indeed does end up back with the industry and go to the people of Victoria as those on the other side are talking about. We certainly know it will be going into debt if it ends up that the wagering licence gets what is anticipated.

The last time the point-of-consumption tax increased we know that it all went to the racing industry. The entire increase went to the racing industry. It would have been good if that had occurred this time around, but we certainly understand that this 15 per cent point-of-consumption tax with 7.5 per cent going to the industry does give us some parity with New South Wales. I certainly expect and appreciate that that is the case. The reason I think it will ultimately go back to the industry is that you only have to look at recent history and the way this government botched the poker machines sales. What a disastrous disgrace that was; they completely botched that. I mentioned in my contribution yesterday

that there are a number of ways that they can maximise the wagering licence. I mentioned too in my speech yesterday that Racing Victoria and the industry have got plenty of ways that the licence can be maximised, and I just hope that the minister responsible gets that right and makes sure that they absolutely get maximum dollars out of that licence.

We will certainly watch with interest to see how all this plays out. Let us hope that, as I mentioned earlier, our colleagues from over the border do not continue this prize money increase. They have attacked Victorian racing to a degree on two fronts – with this prize money battle that is ongoing but also with the invasion of our spring carnival with race dates and pop-up races. For the sake of the racing industry in this country we have got to work together. We have got to be able to support this industry and have a more national approach, rather than the level of state-based parochialism that we have seen in the past. There are other ways. And why I said before that I do not want to see the industry come back cap in hand if New South Wales increase their prize money again is that it should not be a prize money battle that determines whether you have got the best racing state in the country. There are plenty of other ways that you can continue to have this state as the premium racing venue in Australia; it is not wholly and solely all about prize money.

We will be meeting later this week with the Victorian Bookmakers Association in relation to some concerns that they have raised, and there will be other stakeholders we will be meeting with as this bill progresses between the two chambers. We certainly look forward to having those discussions, and it is for that reason that we have reserved our right on our position in the Legislative Council when this bill comes forward. But we do realise that the racing industry needs funding certainty. They should have had this well in place by now to give them that certainty, and that is why we are not opposing this in the Assembly. But I would hope that if we come forth with some commonsense amendments for the betterment of the racing industry more generally for the upper house, we can have those mature discussions with the government to indeed get them passed.

The Greens members I can see on this list here to speak probably will not be up until tomorrow. I am sure the Minister for Racing will join me in hoping that the Greens see that this funding deal secures the future of racing in Victoria. It provides the security that our racing industry needs as a major employer in the state. Let us hope we do not get hauled in here at 5 o'clock on Thursday night having to consider some silly amendments. But it might be one of the rare times, Minister, when we have a decision and a division and we are both on the same side. We do not win many on this side, so it would be good if we could get that over the line, should that eventuate. But I hope it does not, and I hope the Greens can understand that this is a way forward. It does provide security to the racing industry. I hope that when they do stand up they recognise that and they do recognise what a fantastic industry we have in this great state.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (18:44): I must say I am a little bamboozled by the member for Gippsland East. On the one hand you are for the tax increase, on the other hand you are not. On the one hand you think the money is going to come back into the industry, on the other hand you are confident it will not. On the one hand you guys are going to support the bill, but then in the other place you are not. So I am very, very bamboozled.

Members interjecting.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: That was what I heard sitting back here, but maybe I misunderstood, so we will maybe have a chat later or go back and look at *Hansard*. Anyway, I do rise to speak about the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023. As the Minister for Racing very neatly said before, there is a nice nuance between today's bill and the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 that was put yesterday, which I also spoke to. I spoke in this place yesterday on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, and I did so proudly. Some of you were in the chamber at the time when I spoke and told this story, but for those of you that were not I want to let you know I was honoured to be elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, the VRGF, two weeks ago

in a joint sitting. We had our first board meeting on Friday just passed, and I am also joined on the board by the member for Shepparton Kim O'Keeffe and the member for Malvern Michael O'Brien.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation is a statutory authority created by the Victorian Parliament specifically to address the challenge of gambling harm in the Victorian community. It funds research and other activities that add to the knowledge and understanding of gambling harm. It works with partners and communities across Victoria to inform people about the risks of gambling and to provide support to those who need it, including people who are affected by somebody else's gambling. It is a privilege for me to be on the foundation's board, and I very much look forward to advocating to the best of my ability. Anyone, including family or friends, who is experiencing any harm from gambling should reach out to the VRGF. Problem gambling or gambling addiction is a blight on our community. Its social costs and impacts are enormous, and it is simply devastating. As we know, it tears people and families apart.

I spoke yesterday in this house about my firsthand experiences with this. The community of Kororoit, which I represent, is a diverse community. It encompasses two local government areas, Brimbank City Council and also Melton City Council. Whilst Brimbank has the highest losses to gambling of any local government in Victoria, both LGAs in my electorate are ranked in the top 15, a stat that no LGA is proud of. The huge amount of money being lost to these poker machines every day is terrible, and it is impacting our community. It is a social catastrophe. Brimbank LGA's total loss to electronic gaming machines for the 2021–22 financial year was more than \$128 million, while Melton LGA's losses were more than \$68 million. The Brimbank LGA's total losses to EGMs for March 2023 alone amounted to more than \$14 million, while for the Melton LGA the losses for March were more than \$7 million. Urgent action to tackle problem gambling in my electorate is needed now.

I am however happy to note that the Andrews Labor government has introduced a new electronic gaming machine surrender scheme. This scheme will allow clubs and RSLs to give back previously purchased electronic gaming machine entitlements that they cannot use due to not meeting the requirements, with the remaining debts to be wiped. I hope that this scheme will be taken up widely and help reduce the number of gaming machines in Kororoit. I hope that we will see the gambling industry become much more strongly regulated and problem gambling tackled with all the weapons we have at our disposal. I will have much more to say about this issue during my term.

The Gambling Taxation Bill before us today relates to the casino side of gambling. It responds to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, and it is about strengthening oversight of Crown. The royal commission was established in February 2021 to inquire into the report on the sustainability of Crown Melbourne to hold its casino licence, and I note that it is only 2023, so I want to thank and congratulate the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation for her swift action. This followed serious findings after February 2021 against Crown by the New South Wales Independent Commission against Corruption. I understand that with the passage of this bill we will have the final of the 33 recommendations of the royal commission either fully implemented or legislated and awaiting commencement. I note that one of the implementations of the commission's recommendations led to the establishment of a data committee led by the VRGF that oversees data collection in use from the casino, which will be used to monitor and protect vulnerable people from gambling harm.

Currently casino taxes are paid by casino operator Crown Melbourne in accordance with a management agreement between the operator and the state. Under the management agreement, casino tax is imposed on the casino operator's gaming revenue relating to table games and electronic gaming machines. The casino operator also pays a monthly community benefit levy on its total gaming revenue, and the casino operator is liable for additional casino taxes in respect to a financial year. Disgustingly, the royal commission determined that Crown Melbourne improperly claimed deductions in the calculation of its casino tax payable. This was under the management agreement, resulting in underpayments to the state since at least 2012. The royal commission report noted the unusual situation that there is no other financial consequence if casino tax is not paid, even if it is intentionally not paid, due to a loophole of

the existing legislation not applying to tax payable under the management agreement. The bill rectifies this by transferring the casino taxation provisions into a new act, called the Gambling Taxation Act, which will be subject to the Taxation Administration Act 1997.

Administration and collection of casino tax will transfer to the commissioner of state revenue from the State Revenue Office while all other regulatory functions relating to the casino will remain with the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission under the act. The casino operator will be required to lodge returns and pay casino taxes monthly to the commissioner. The State Revenue Office is well placed to provide the strongest level of oversight in relation to Crown's tax affairs and has the capacity to conduct rigorous compliance, including the ability to impose taxation penalties. The Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, or VGCCC, is the strongest regulator in the country, and it will continue to have responsibility for other regulatory functions in relation to the casino licensee.

The VGCCC now has a dedicated casino division and regulatory function which oversees operations 24 hours a day. The commission will be there if Crown decides to break the law, and it has the power and authority to hold it to account. The Andrews Labor government's Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Act 2021 increased the maximum fine the regulator can impose on Crown for disciplinary action from \$1 million to \$100 million, and the VGCCC has already used its new powers to fine Crown a total of \$200 million since last year for breaching its obligations, including for the illegal transfer of funds and for consistently failing to intervene to protect customers from gambling harm.

Mandatory precommitment via carded play will also come into effect across the casino. This means that all gambling activity must be tracked, and cash will be limited to \$1000 per 24 hours for pokies and table games. Finally, the bill implements an increase in the rate of wagering and betting tax from 10 per cent to 15 per cent from 1 July 2024. As mentioned on a number of occasions by a number of members, this will bring us into alignment with New South Wales and most other states and territories around the country.

The bill also legislates to align the tax rate for Crown's electronic gaming machines to match the rates applying to club venue operators. This initiative will see Crown pay its fair share of gambling tax, which will benefit all Victorians. The change will increase tax revenue without increasing consumers' gambling expenditure. It will improve equity by ensuring that large gambling organisations will now be taxed at rates equivalent to those applicable to smaller not-for-profit, community-based venues, something which I believe is well overdue. I am pleased that the Andrews government has also gone beyond the royal commission's recommendations with the laws that will automatically cancel Crown's licence unless the regulator is clearly satisfied that Crown is suitable to continue operating Melbourne's casino. Crown is now under new ownership, but the onus is nonetheless still on Crown to clearly demonstrate why its licence should not be cancelled by the regulator. There is much, much more to be done in this space, but I commend the bill to the Assembly.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:54): I rise to make some comments on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023 – two main provisions in this. Firstly, we see the changes for the way the casino operator licence now should be operating after the failures we have seen through the royal commission back in 2021. I want to commend the work of Commissioner Finkelstein on that review. And let us remind this chamber and this government that it was New South Wales that found the mess, and New South Wales actually then relayed the problems of Crown Casino to ensure that finally, after it was revealed by the New South Wales commission, something would be done. We are now in 2023 getting some of these things – long overdue, but importantly – fixed.

The increase of money is very important – \$30 million in terms of the increase in the pokie machines. That will hopefully be going back into important things like schools, hospitals, roads and other things that need to be done. We know that the government is going to be absolutely skint for cash when it comes to the budget next week, so every dollar is going to help. If we have got to raise that through gambling, then so be it, because we know that we desperately need basic services to be funded.

The other part, if I could just briefly mention it, is that particularly when it comes to the changes in the consumption levy, there is an increase in that consumption levy by 5 per cent, from 10 to 15 per cent, 4 per cent of which is going into racing and another per cent, I believe, into consolidated revenue – although we still do not have the full details.

What we have here is \$119 million into racing. Can I say, having Caulfield Racecourse, it is a great facility in desperate need of an upgrade. We have been talking about this for a long time. We had the government supporting a big, bold vision of \$570 million to upgrade the middle; for sports facilities, recreation, a whole range of things, we are still waiting. There has not been one dollar from the Andrews Labor government when it comes to upgrading the middle. We have got a new trust. The previous minister for the environment, the current Minister for Energy and Resources, was up and about cutting ribbons and talking up what we could have in the middle of the racecourse. We have one of the lowest amounts of open space in the state and are desperately in need of recreation and sporting facilities, and we are still waiting. We have some funds here. I would hope as part of that, as part of the budget next week, that we would see the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve upgraded. We desperately need it. No more talk – let us get some action.

I understand also there has been some negotiation of the rental arrangement between the Caulfield Racecourse and the trust which funds the middle of the racecourse. I am not sure where that is at. I would ask the government to certainly come clean as to where that is, because at the moment that is the only funding that is available for the trust. I am told that if the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve Trust does not get the funds that it desperately needs, it will literally have to turn the lights off and lock the door, because the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve Trust has run out of money.

So while we are talking up certainly racing, while we are talking up the idea that gambling and racing are important and an integral part in terms of what they do within our community – with industry, with jobs, with a whole range of things – let us not forget for 1 minute about how we can take these wonderful facilities which are in the middle of these racecourses and turn them into public open space. That is what it is: Crown land, public open space. So we can have racing on the outside – the jobs and industry and everything else that it benefits – and we should also look at what that does in the middle of these racecourses. This government need to actually get off their hands and support it with some sort of funding.

We are talking about money here. We are talking about money going back into racing. Let us make sure that when we talk about that, we talk about racetracks. I know the Caulfield Racecourse themselves have put half the \$570 million to do the outside in terms of what is involved in racing. The government now needs to come clean with their fair share and stump up the cash to do the middle. It is a partnership. We often talk about partnerships. It is time for the Andrews Labor government to actually stump up the cash that the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve desperately needs.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (18:59): I rise tonight – and I look forward to rising tomorrow on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

HAMR Energy

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:00): (171) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development, and the action I seek is for the minister to support HAMR Energy's innovative attempt to produce green methanol – a low-carbon shipping alternative – at Portland. Tasmania has a similar project but it is nowhere near the scale or the potential of Portland. Two ingredients are needed to make green methanol: hydrogen, which is extracted from water in a process

called electrolysis, and carbon dioxide. HAMR Energy seek to produce carbon dioxide from forestry industry by-products. Forestry is a well-established industry in the Portland area. The green triangle region, which includes Portland, has the largest commercial forestry industry in Australia, exporting 52 per cent of Australia's commercial plantation. The Portland region exports millions of tonnes of timber each year. It is anticipated that around 300,000 tonnes of forestry industry by-products, including litter from the plantation floor, trimmings, damaged goods and parts of fire-damaged plantations, will be used to create green methanol.

Shipping is responsible for 2 per cent of the world's annual carbon emissions. Green methanol emits 90 per cent less carbon than regular fuel, and the shipping industry's transition to green methanol will assist the industry in meeting its international emissions obligations. As green methanol is a liquid, it is safer, less toxic, easier and more efficient to transport and store. The HAMR Energy flagship project, Portland Renewable Fuels, has a target to produce 200 kilotonnes of green methanol each year. HAMR Energy anticipate that employment will be created for over 80 people, and it is projected that by 2027 over 100 methanol-powered vessels will be in operation, indicating a clear demand for this product.

It is an exciting time for energy generation. This is the perfect time for Victoria to be ahead of the game. This is a perfect opportunity for the Minister for Regional Development to demonstrate that this government does in fact govern for all Victorians. Regional Development Victoria purports to be the Victorian government's lead agency responsible for rural and regional economic development. One of Regional Development Victoria's strategic directions for the Great South Coast is to maximise the potential of the region's energy resources – sounds like a perfect fit for HAMR Energy's Portland Renewable Fuels. Portland is the perfect location for this project. It has a deep-water port, it has a forestry industry on its doorstep, it has a 500,000-volt power connection and it has access to renewable energy. I call on the minister to support HAMR Energy and its development of green methanol at Portland.

State Emergency Service Chelsea unit

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:03): (172) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is to invite the minister to visit the Chelsea SES unit in my electorate and meet with the wonderful volunteers who support our community each and every day.

For decades Victorians have been tirelessly served by a special group of volunteers that don the orange, and we want to give them a big shout-out today as part of Wear Orange Wednesday. They turn up in the middle of the night, in storms, in floods, at accidents and emergency incidents across our state, to support their fellow Victorians in those times. When communities are confronted with these distressing scenes, it is the kindness and compassion of the SES volunteers that has charted a course through the despair and uncertainty like the clearing skies after a fierce storm. It is that selfless service of our volunteers and the care that they provide that is the best part of the State Emergency Service and indeed our Victorian culture.

The Chelsea SES unit is a special crew. They are the oldest unit in Victoria. Established in 1953, they will celebrate their 70th year of service this year. They attend to hundreds of calls, and just locally. They answer distress calls across our state in rural and regional Victoria, and they even cross state boundaries to support their fellow Australians. Just recently we had the opportunity to open their \$7 million Andrews Labor government-supported unit. It was an amazing day, and I want to give a big shout-out to unit controller Ron Fitch, who has 30 years service in the SES and was recently awarded the Emergency Services Medal, and Phil Wall, with 20 years service as deputy controller.

It was an amazing day to celebrate with our local community and recognise all of the legacy and service, but it was also a chance to acknowledge people who could no longer be with us. Natasha Drake is one of those people, who sadly passed away at the age of 27 from an aneurysm. We were able to, as part of that event, open the Natasha Drake memorial garden, a really moving and telling recognition of someone who had dedicated more than five years of her life to volunteering in her community, and the Graeme Russell memorial meeting room as well. Graeme lived and breathed the

SES each and every day, and it was just a real privilege to join Graeme's family and Tasha's family to recognise the service of those who, sadly, could not be with us but who have underpinned the culture and the ethos of Chelsea SES unit for so many years.

I would really love to invite the Minister for Emergency Services to my community to see what we all know and love in our patch: the Chelsea SES unit and their volunteers are truly extraordinary. They are the oldest SES unit in Victoria, and I want to show them off and just show the best parts of the City of Kingston and what our volunteers have to offer as part of National Volunteer Week. We give them a big shout-out.

Shepparton electorate schools

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:06): (173) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education and the action that I seek is that the minister meet with the principal of the Greater Shepparton Secondary College, the principal of Shepparton Notre Dame College and local stakeholders to find a solution to address the current issues the schools are experiencing. An amalgamation of our four state high schools onto one site has met with challenges and the need for immediate support. These issues have escalated in the past months, including an unmanageable task at the school bus interchange, located in Skene Street, next to Notre Dame College. The bus interchange has excess students from both schools gathering at the site and has become a target location for some students and non-students to gather and cause trouble. There has been an ongoing issue with student assaults at this site, leaving some students seriously injured, and we are having constant concerns with children's safety. Both schools have been trying to manage the circumstances, but it is beyond their capacity and ability. John Cortese, the principal of Notre Dame, is calling for increased CCTV and extra security officers and is seeking solutions to create a safer environment for all the students at the bus interchange site.

In addition, concerns have been raised that student teachers undertaking teacher placements at the Greater Shepparton Secondary College are not being adequately prepared or supported and are experiencing a volatile environment, causing stress and in some cases leading to some student teachers dropping out, feeling disillusioned with the industry. Current teachers at the site have also said that staffing in the region has reached a critical point and have grave concerns for the future education of students. At a time when we are already experiencing teacher shortages, we need to ensure that a career in teaching is the wonderful career path that it should be, and it should be safe to travel to and from school and have a positive secondary school experience. I seek that the minister meet with the principal of the Greater Shepparton Secondary College, the principal of Notre Dame College and local stakeholders as a matter of urgency.

Truganina estates

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:08): (174) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that the minister join me in Truganina for a tour of new and developing estates. As the minister knows very well, Truganina and the City of Wyndham sit in one of the largest growth corridors here in this country. Decisions made in this portfolio can have life-altering impacts, not only for residents currently living in our patch of Melbourne but indeed for those who will call the outer suburbs home in the future. We know that planning decisions, very sadly, were rammed through by the former Liberal government here in Victoria, and we have seen that have a real and very lasting impact on the composition of these new estates. What we know is that Melbourne is set to have an extra 3.1 million people by 2050. That is just extraordinary: 3.1 million people by 2050. We cannot just push and squeeze all of these people into housing estates in the outer suburbs. That is no way to manage population growth. Communities like Wyndham have experienced the brunt of these growing pains over the last 20 years. It is why the minister's recent comments about urban sprawl and her desire to refocus and support development in established areas is absolute music to our ears in the outer west. It is why I would like to show the minister firsthand the impacts of planning decisions in areas like Truganina, which she can then bear in mind when making proposed changes to the planning system.

Mooroolbark–Hull roads, Mooroolbark

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:09): (175) The Mooroolbark Road and Hull Road intersection under the railway bridge in Mooroolbark is dangerous and congested, and yet the Andrews Labor government still refuses to allocate any funding to widen the road and upgrade this intersection to make it safer. It is a major bottleneck for traffic congestion and accidents. As a single-lane bottleneck there are confusion, regular accidents, near misses and even – troublingly – repeated car crashes through the so-called safety fence on Hull Road at the T-intersection and cars crashing through the fences of homes at this intersection, yet still the Andrews government does nothing. The Mooroolbark and Hull roads intersection in Mooroolbark is a major thoroughfare for local residents not only in Mooroolbark but also in Lilydale, Chirnside Park and Mount Evelyn. Despite me having highlighted the dangers of this intersection numerous times here in Parliament, the Andrews Labor government continues to ignore the desperate need to widen and upgrade these roads and this intersection.

So the action I seek is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to allocate funding in the upcoming state budget for a major safety upgrade to the intersection of Mooroolbark and Hull roads in Mooroolbark, including widening the lanes on Mooroolbark Road, especially under the bridge, making it a dual carriageway, and to join with me to visit this intersection to see how important this investment would be for my community, because this intersection remains a single-lane bottleneck. Whether it is cars, buses or, say, ambulances or fire trucks needing to get through in an emergency, only one lane of traffic can get through and pass under the rail bridge at any one time. It is a massive safety hazard.

Given the government has confirmed that the low height of the rail bridge is not a limitation on the ability to widen this underpass, why has it done nothing to act? Why does it continue to refuse to allocate funding to make this intersection safer and meet the needs of this growing community? They are state roads and the responsibility of this government. Our community deserves that this government fix this dangerous and congested intersection in Mooroolbark, at Mooroolbark and Hull roads. Do it before the congestion will drastically worsen as thousands more cars come into the area as a result of the thousands of new homes being built at the Kinley housing development just next door.

State Emergency Service Whittlesea unit

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (19:12): (176) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the Whittlesea SES unit. As the member for Mordialloc said, today is Wear Orange Wednesday, and I do that proudly. It is a chance for the community to demonstrate our thankfulness to SES volunteers who so generously give their time to help people at some of the hardest moments in their lives. My thanks go to the Whittlesea SES unit, who have demonstrated their commitment to our community. People from all walks of life make up their ranks. One of their most active members is Micaela Hill, who runs a construction business with her husband. You can imagine somebody so busy, and yet they give so much of their time to help people in floods, in storms and in other emergency situations.

Whittlesea SES is ably led by Gary Doorbar ESM. Each time I drive along the Wallan-Whittlesea Road I pass the sideways stump of an incredibly large tree which came down during the difficult weather events we had at the end of the year. Gary was nearby responding to other incidents and was there to assist and remove the tree. I happened to be at the unit at the time. I had dropped in to check in on the volunteers who had been spending many hours looking after people in our community. So every time I pass the tree stump I think of Gary out in the pouring rain with a chainsaw and myself in the warmth eating a doughnut, and I remain very thankful to the Whittlesea SES for all they do.

They recently ran a recruitment drive, which had good interest from our community. The number of events the unit is responding to each year is growing, because we as a community are growing. This places additional strain on volunteers, meaning they have to turn out to more and more incidents. We want to keep our volunteers fresh and ready. However, there is a constraint on the unit whereby the size of their training and meeting rooms means that they cannot expand much more in terms of

volunteers. It is important that we support them to ensure that their volunteers are looked after, appropriately trained and appropriately rotated so that they are there for us when we need them. It is the least we can do. I ask the minister to join me in visiting the unit to view the facilities and hear from the volunteers about the constraints they face.

State Emergency Service Malvern and Port Phillip units

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (19:15): (177) My adjournment is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to fund the relocation of both the Port Phillip and Malvern State Emergency Service stations to suitable sites. Both Port Phillip and Malvern cover the Pahran electorate. I recently visited both branches and met with volunteers there. Both units are in desperate need of new stations and require funding to move to more suitable premises. Today is a day to say thank you to our SES volunteers, and what better way could the government say thank you than by actually funding the relocation of both these stations?

I certainly invite the minister to go down to both Port Phillip and Malvern stations and just see how inadequate their current facilities are. Their current depots are just not large enough to accommodate the minimum number of volunteers required or their vehicles and assets. Malvern SES need 76 members but currently only have half this number due to the space limits at their depot. There is no secure parking for their trucks, which deteriorate in the elements and are vulnerable to vandalism and theft. The current depot is also on council land, which they could take back at any point. At Port Phillip SES their existing facilities are spread over multiple buildings, with external storage in a shipping container which is shared with other users. There is only a single lane to enter and exit the site. These facilities are not accessible or well maintained, and the shared facilities create risks for volunteers on site.

Both Malvern and Port Phillip SES units have identified land for potential relocation; they just need government funding to make it happen. Our local SES units are severely underfunded. They are under-resourced, which impacts their ability to provide emergency services to the community. Local units only receive a small amount of funding per year and then have to fundraise the rest. When SES units are not properly funded they are unable to respond effectively to disasters in our community, and that will become even more acute as disasters caused by climate change increase. A properly funded and equipped SES is vital to the safety of our community, so I would urge the government to adequately fund the SES and fund the relocation of both the Malvern and Port Phillip units to more suitable locations.

Suburban Rail Loop

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:17): (178) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier in her role as Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The action I seek is for the Deputy Premier to visit Glen Waverley so that she can view the location of the Suburban Rail Loop station and determine how best to connect this to the existing Glen Waverley station. My community is seeking the best possible outcome so that there is an easy, efficient Disability Discrimination Act 1992 compliant connection between these stations. It is wonderful to see the works have already begun in Glen Waverley on the Suburban Rail Loop. Works are currently underway to move many of the existing services from around the location of where the underground station will be located.

Way back on 29 August 2018 I was extremely fortunate to be at Monash University when the Premier, the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and the Deputy Speaker made the truly historic announcement that a re-elected Andrews Labor government would be building the Suburban Rail Loop. It was an excellent day during the campaign last year when the previous Leader of the Opposition decided that the coalition would cancel the project if elected.

My community overwhelmingly supports this project. The Suburban Rail Loop will create thousands of jobs, will help our local economy grow and will connect Glen Waverley to the rest of the east. The loop is vital for our future generations. Once the SRL East project is finished people will be able to get from Glen Waverley to Monash University in 3 minutes rather than the usual 23 minutes in peak-hour

traffic, creating a shorter, safer and more efficient mode of transport that will benefit my constituents and those in neighbouring electorates such as Ashwood, Box Hill, Clarinda and Oakleigh. Many of these will benefit from this project.

I am also the co-chair currently of the Suburban Rail Loop Glen Waverley precinct reference group, taking over the co-chair from you, Deputy Speaker, and we have been consulting with local businesses, residents and community organisations on the impacts of the SRL and how the SRL will help our community. My constituents and I are excited about the progress of the Suburban Rail Loop. I would like to thank the Deputy Premier for all her work on the Suburban Rail Loop, and I look forward to her response.

Benambra electorate roads

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (19:19): (179) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide a priority time line for the urgent works on failed culverts that have led to road closures and traffic control measures throughout the Benambra district. I want to know what the pipeline is for the pipe works. At present we have Beechworth-Wodonga Road closed, commuters forced to take a less than ideal back road and a culvert made of granite blocks. I think most of us here might know how that happened, but one block has shifted. One block has completely fallen out.

Many of you here and you, Deputy Speaker, would know that Beechworth has the only true living history of the gold rush and the Kelly Gang story, but Beechworth and surrounding hobby farms are basically dormitories for people working in Wodonga, Albury and Wangaratta. The detour is a major issue for those travelling to work, school or doctors appointments or simply just doing their shopping. Others say it is a death trap. It was closed at Easter, and there is still no time line for the works. Of course social media has filled the void, with well-intentioned, community-minded folk having decided it is going to take around 18 months to fix. I think you can appreciate that that is unacceptable. It is also reduced to one lane a little closer to Wodonga, through another failed culvert.

Then we have the Murray Valley Highway just past the turn-off to Old Tallangatta. On this road to the Upper Murray, which, again, carries workers, students, logging trucks, B-doubles, milk trucks and a range of others, there are now traffic lights at two spots – one near the Hillock Australian White sheep stud and the other about a kilometre further on towards Corryong. Damaged culverts have reduced traffic to one lane. Bruce Campbell, who lives nearby to all this, fears the worst. He has already seen motorists frustrated by the delays run the red light. He is worried that on foggy mornings an unsuspecting B-double will tear into what is a winding section of road and cause major trauma. The lights have already been in place for the best part of three months. Bruce wants to know how long it is going to take to fix. The failure of these culverts has become systemic. We had the Gooramadda gorge, a 6-metre-deep chasm created by a failed culvert near Rutherglen on a major freight road, Indigo Creek Road. It still has a temporary fix after it was cut last November.

Road funding cannot be reduced in this budget. The damage from the 2022 rains highlighted the failure to adequately fund our road crews and the dire state of our roads, including these culverts from another century. You cannot replace them like for like, but they must be better and have greater capacity to be cleared more often. The Victorian Transport Association estimated \$1 billion is needed for the post-flood reconstruction, but the government has only provided \$165 million. (*Time expired*)

Ballarat International Foto Biennale

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:22): (180) I direct my adjournment matter to the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action I seek is for him to visit my electorate of Wendouree to meet with the Ballarat International Foto Biennale CEO Vanessa Gerrans and board members to discuss the upcoming 2023 biennale, which will be held from 26 August to 22 October this year. In 2023 we will be celebrating the 10th Ballarat International Foto Biennale. It was first held in 2005 in regional

Victoria and has evolved into Australia's leading and most engaging photography festival. Once again the Ballarat International Foto Biennale will be a huge drawcard for visitors to our city.

Previously the Ballarat International Foto Biennale's blockbuster exhibitions at the Ballarat art gallery have included David LaChapelle, Liu Bolin and Linda McCartney and attracted more than 80,000 visitors. I am confident that the 2023 BIFB program will not disappoint, with visitors being invited to come and see the real thing. Visitors will engage with portraiture, landscapes, live streaming and more through the lens of international and local artists as they visit local galleries, explore laneways and access historic buildings and local businesses. The Ballarat International Foto Biennale offers another excellent reason for visitors from Melbourne and regional Victoria to visit Ballarat as well as for national and international visitors to put Ballarat on their must-visit list.

Significantly the Ballarat International Foto Biennale contributes millions of dollars of direct economic impact to Ballarat over the two months from August to October each other year, and I am sure this year's biennale will be even more popular than ever. It is great to see so many local businesses supporting the biennale's open program, including Studio g.a.s., the Grand hotel, Sushi Noodle, Rocket and Belle, Kilderkin Distillery, the Royal Mail pub, Saigon Allee, Roy Hammond and L'espresso. These venues and many others will provide a place for emerging and established photographers to exhibit their work during the biennale. Key institutions, including Sovereign Hill and Ballarat Trades Hall will also be BIFB venues. I am really looking forward to welcoming the Minister for Creative Industries to Ballarat to learn more about the 2023 Ballarat International Foto Biennale.

Responses

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (19:25): Firstly, can I say how wonderfully appropriate it is that the Minister for Emergency Services was a popular recipient of adjournment matters this evening, with the members for Mordialloc, Yan Yean and Prahran raising matters for that minister's attention. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter asking that the Minister for Emergency Services join the member and visit the Chelsea SES unit, the oldest SES unit in the state, to meet with local volunteers. The member for Yan Yean raised a matter also asking that the minister join the member and visit the Whittlesea SES unit to view those facilities and hear from volunteers. The member for Prahran raised a matter asking that the minister fund the relocation of the Port Phillip and Malvern SES stations.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Regional Development. The action being sought was that the minister support HAMR Energy to develop green methanol fuel at Portland. The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Education asking that the minister meet with the principals of the Greater Shepparton and Notre Dame schools in her electorate and other stakeholders to discuss issues regarding bus interchange and education career issues and other matters. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Planning. The action being sought was that the minister join with the member to tour new and developing estates in her electorate. The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action being sought was that the minister allocate funding for a major safety upgrade of the intersection of Mooroolbark and Hull roads in Mooroolbark, including for the widening of that road, and for the minister to join the member in visiting that site.

The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The action being sought was that the minister join the member and visit the Suburban Rail Loop station site to see how to best connect that site to the existing Glen Waverley station. The member for Benambra also raised a matter for the minister for roads. The action being sought was that the minister provide a time line for works for failed or damaged culverts in the Benambra district. The member for Wendouree raised a matter for the Minister for Creative Industries. The action being sought was for the minister to join the member and visit her electorate to meet with the CEO of the Ballarat International Foto Biennale. I will refer all of these matters to the appropriate ministers for action.

ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday 17 May 2023

Legislative Assembly

1795

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. I am sure we all thank all of our SES volunteers, including George Haitidis down at the Monash SES and my sister-in-law Emma Hastings, who has just joined as a volunteer. How good is that? Anyway, the house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:29 pm.