



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 29 May 2024**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew <sup>1</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaëlle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, David <sup>3</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
			Welch, Richard <sup>4</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>3</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>4</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Wednesday 29 May 2024**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Committees***Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Reporting dates*

**The PRESIDENT (09:33):** I advise the house that I have received a letter from the chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee advising that the committee has agreed to extend the reporting date of its self-referred inquiry into pig welfare in Victoria from 30 May 2024 to 20 June 2024.

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Guardianship and Decision-making for Vulnerable Adults, May 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule No. 36.

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.***Motions***Middle East conflict**

**Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (09:44):** I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since the Legislative Council's resolution on 17 October 2023 concerning Israel and Gaza, which stated that this house 'stands with Israel', the following has occurred:
  - (a) over 100,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, injured and/or are missing;
  - (b) a growing humanitarian catastrophe caused by the state of Israel's blockade, bombing and invasion of Gaza;
  - (c) the state of Israel has begun bombing tent camps in safe zones where over 1.2 million Palestinians are sheltering, injuring dozens of people, including children;
- (2) recognises the brave and courageous Victorians that continue to protest and demonstrate against this genocide;
- (3) stands with students who have been threatened with misconduct for standing up against the invasion of Gaza;
- (4) calls on universities to cease their misconduct proceedings for peaceful protests and to disclose and divest their relationships with weapons manufacturers;
- (5) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza; and
- (6) supports calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

**Leave refused.**

*Members statements***North-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:45): It is really important that when you need to spend a penny at school this government, the Allan Labor government, knows and understands and we will spend a penny. I am really pleased to say that in recent upgrades to schools Andersons Creek Primary School will be receiving around half a million dollars to upgrade their toilet block. We know toilet facilities in our public schools are incredibly important, and not only if you have got the call of nature – you may need a quiet moment just to gather your thoughts. I am pleased to say that a similar amount, almost \$500,000, is going towards East Doncaster Secondary College because we are also upgrading their toilet facilities. We are providing important infrastructure for teachers and students where they can have a place to meet as well. It is a very important investment in our fantastic public schools in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. I know, having visited those schools a number of times, that those public schools do an amazing job educating our fantastic students every day. I just want to thank the teachers, the staff and the principals at those schools for the amazing job that they do in continuing to educate our best and brightest as they come through our fantastic public education system.

**Anti-vilification legislation**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:46): About 140 years ago Frederick Douglass, a former slave and staunch abolitionist, delivered a speech in Boston centred around the theme ‘How can slavery be abolished?’ It is worth quoting from that speech at length:

Liberty is meaningless where the right to utter one’s thoughts and opinions has ceased to exist. That, of all rights, is the dread of tyrants. It is the right which they first of all strike down. They know its power. Thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, founded in injustice and wrong, are sure to tremble, if men are allowed reason of righteousness, temperance, and of a judgment to come in their presence. Slavery cannot tolerate free speech. Five years of its exercise would banish the auction block and break every chain in the South.

Now we have the Greens, Labor and the Liberal Party in a downward spiral competing over which speech they want to outlaw and criminalise first. The federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus is apparently working on laws that will extend current laws to criminalise a range of speech. The federal opposition and Greens in principle support this. Let me repeat the words of Frederick Douglass: of all rights, it is free speech that is the dread of tyrants. I am sure everyone supporting these laws thinks they are the good guys, but let me state clearly here they are not. History tells us that the censors are never the good guys. Hate speech laws are a sword without a hilt. They cannot be wielded safely, and they will hurt everyone.

**Julie Suares**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (09:48): Julie Suares was a Labor woman. She died on 12 May 2024. She was a sister, aunt, horserider, electorate officer, shearers cook, historian and author. I worked alongside Julie for many years. Julie was an executive member for many years in the Ararat branch and the Wannon federal electorate assembly. She advocated for outer regional communities and supported the progress of regional women. I so very much enjoyed working alongside Julie, and her friendship. She wrote a book *JB Chifley: An Ardent Internationalist* published in 2019, for which she received her doctorate at Deakin University. Julie died at a time when all the stars were shining for her beloved causes – the seat of Ripon is back in Labor hands under the dedicated care of Martha Haylett in the other place, the state of Victoria is Labor, the nation is Labor and, equally important, her beloved Magpies are the reigning premiers. In Ben Chifley’s words, as quoted in Julie’s book:

No one can live alone; we all are dependent on each other.

Julie, we had the honour of depending on you, and we will miss you. I offer my condolences to Julie’s sister Lyn Hughes, her niece Jessie and the rest of her family.



### Geelong Food Assistance Network

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (09:50): People in Victoria are doing it tough. Money is tight for families, for single parents and for students. Cost-of-living pressures are affecting people all across my community. In my electorate of Western Victoria there are areas facing the highest socio-economic disadvantage levels in the state, including Norlane, Newcomb, Whittington, Corio, Moolap and Lovely Banks. On Monday I attended a meeting of community members and organisations who dedicate much of their time in aid of these communities. The Geelong Food Assistance Network brings together food relief, homelessness and other charity groups, working together to alleviate hunger in our region. The network is an opportunity for collaboration, networking, advocacy and support. Between them they provide millions of meals to people across our region. They want to ensure that no matter what your financial circumstances are, you can have food on the table. But demand is growing substantially, and all organisations report seeing many people who have never had to access support from them before, who have never had to access food relief, and more people with very complex needs. I want to take the opportunity to thank the Geelong Food Assistance Network for the work that they do, but I also hope that one day we can put them out of work by ensuring that everyone can afford to feed themselves.

### Africa Day

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:51): It was wonderful to be part of the amazing and vibrant Africa Day gala celebration at the Melbourne Town Hall last weekend along with my good friend Minister Stitt. Africa Day is a celebration of Africa's unity, countries, culture and arts. It is a day that symbolises the collective aspirations of African nations for solidarity, freedom and peace. It embodies the spirit of African resilience and cultural richness, uniting people from Africa's many different countries in a shared commitment to the continent's future. This celebration also highlights the importance of cultural preservation and expression. I acknowledge, recognise and appreciate the significant contributions of Victoria's African communities to our wonderfully diverse multicultural society.

The Victorian government is committed to fostering social cohesion and inclusion, ensuring that all Victorians feel a sense of belonging and are free to share and celebrate their cultural heritage, language and traditions. In 2024 the Africa Day theme is 'Educate an African fit for the 21st century'. This includes building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality and relevant learning. This is something that the Allan Labor government is committed to here in the Education State, which is backed up by our unprecedented investment in education. Victoria's multicultural communities, like our African communities, make significant social, cultural and economic contributions to the success of Victoria every day, and this wonderful program and vibrant event was a celebration showcasing all things African, where old friends and new came together in unity.

Congratulations to all the amazing organisations recognised that evening for their invaluable contributions supporting the community and for continuing to promote the values of unity and inclusivity, enhancing our state's social fabric. Thanks to the Africa Day president Qiniso Dube, the Africa Day committee, the sponsors, Fred Alale AM and everyone involved in making this amazing event such a success.

### Floods

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:53): As the inquiry into the 2022 floods draws to its 30 June deadline, startling evidence has been provided to the community and the committee in the form of new flood modelling for the Maribyrnong River. Three new suburban areas previously deemed as 'flood safe' are now subject to inundation, devastating thousands of residents who face flooding, skyrocketing insurance costs and reduced property values. This modelling is the first in Victoria to really capture the likely impacts of climate change, and the inquiry has heard that most catchments have outdated flood modelling. Modelling for the Maribyrnong is 20 years old, and

Melbourne Water is commencing updated modelling for all Greater Melbourne catchments. Around 200,000 properties are on land currently deemed to be floodplains, and this number will doubtless increase significantly as new modelling is released. All members' regions will likely be affected by revised flood modelling. Unfortunately, the information from Melbourne Water was only released on 30 April, and it raises as many questions as it answers. A significant number of questions to Melbourne Water were flagged in the recent hearings, striking at both the veracity of the modelling and how results are communicated to the community. There is well-founded concern in the community that the inquiry process will be concluded before appropriate answers are received and considered by the committee. My constituents seek the support of this chamber to ensure that such fears are unfounded.

### IDAHOBIT

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:54): Friday 17 May marks the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, or IDAHOBIT, as it is known. This day is observed all around the world as an occasion of solidarity and celebration with the broader queer and gender-diverse community. On IDAHOBIT I had the pleasure to attend the launch of a groundbreaking study into LGBTIQ+ involvement in sport around our state, exploring the challenges and improvements that can be made in Victoria to ensure our rainbow community is respected, valued and welcomed in sports settings. A big shout-out to VicHealth and all the professors and researchers who are undertaking this initiative and working through the hurdle so many in our queer community face both on and off the pitch. I am proud to stand here as a member of the Allan Labor government, a government that stands side by side with our queer and gender-diverse community, a government that stands up to hate and bigotry. This government categorically stands against all forms of discrimination, and IDAHOBIT is a good reminder about why we must continue to fight for and support this state's rainbow community.

### Workplace safety

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:55): Prior to coming into this place I had the privilege of spending well over a decade representing frontline retail and fast-food workers in their places of work and with their workplace grievances and needs. I had the pleasure of supporting them through times of difficulty as well as good times. I also far too often saw so many cases of retail workers being abused or assaulted in their place of work by customers. The abuse or assault of anyone else, but especially a service worker, is completely and utterly unacceptable. It is one of the reasons why in my inaugural speech in this place I talked about increasing the penalties for assaulting frontline workers, such as retail workers, as one of my priorities and the reason why I am so excited that our Premier Jacinta Allan just a few weeks ago announced that this Labor government will do just that. This Labor government will implement tougher penalties for assaulting retail workers, hospitality workers, bus drivers or anyone on the front line who is dealing with the public day to day. Far too often these people are vulnerable. In the case of retail and fast food it is often their first job. This is a significant reform that has been announced by the Premier that will make a real difference for working Victorians, and I am absolutely proud to be part of a government that will be delivering these reforms.

### Great forest national park

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (09:57): On the weekend, on Sunday, I went out to Drouin for the rally against the great forest national park. About a thousand people turned up, which showed the depth of concern about this potential national park. It was interesting that I heard a lot of people were using it, but I also heard on the news that night about one political party saying that it will open up the areas for people to go into. Actually it is quite the opposite. Right now, as a state forest, you can go into these places with dogs, you can go into places where you do not need a permit to camp – you can do all sorts of things. If it becomes a national park, it will actually get harder. So we should all say no to the great forest national park.

### Shooting sports

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (09:58): Also, in Queen's Hall you will see that there is a responsible shooting expo, for want of a better term, just to showcase the different disciplines there are in shooting and that it is a sport that is actually for everyone, regardless of anything, if you are interested. I recommend that everyone drop through and have a look and have a talk.

### Bills

#### **Payroll Tax Amendment (Protecting Victorians' Access to GPs, Dentists and Other Allied Health Practitioners) Bill 2023**

##### *Statement of compatibility*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, I table a Statement of Compatibility in relation to the *Payroll Tax Amendment (Protecting Victorians' Access to GPs, Dentists and Other Allied Health Practitioners) Bill 2023*.

In my opinion, the *Payroll Tax Amendment (Protecting Victorians' Access to GPs, Dentists and Other Allied Health Practitioners) Bill 2023* (the Bill), as introduced in the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

##### Overview of the Bill

The main purpose of the Bill is to amend *the Payroll Tax Act 2007* to exempt payments made by medical centres to registered medical practitioners from being assessed as liable for payroll tax where those registered medical practitioners provide medical related services at the medical centre.

##### Human rights issues

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

The Bill does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human right and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter.

##### Conclusion

It is my view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities because it does not raise a human rights issue.

**Georgie Crozier MP**

##### *Second reading*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:59): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

##### Purpose

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Payroll Tax Act 2007 to exempt payments made by medical clinics to general practitioners and allied health practitioners from being assessed as liable for payroll tax where those registered medical practitioners provide medical-related services at the medical centre.

The bill effectively reverses the State Revenue Office's (SRO) ruling PTA-041 and provides that certain contracts are not relevant contracts for payroll tax purposes.

##### Background

###### **Labor's health tax: the State Revenue Office ruling**

There are currently around 1500 GP clinics in Victoria, which already pay payroll tax for employees, e.g., reception staff, nurses, and trainee doctors. The historical tax position was that tenant general practitioners (GPs) (also known as contractor doctors) who lease rooms from a practice were not treated as employees and were therefore exempt from payroll tax.

On 11 August 2023, the State Revenue Office (SRO) ruled that tenant GPs in medical clinics are employees of a practice rather than independent contractors for the purposes of payroll tax obligations, as outlined in division 7 of part 3 of the Payroll Tax Act 2007 (Vic).

The SRO is relying on this ruling to impose payroll tax liability on medical practices with contracted GPs.

The SRO ruling incorporates court decisions in NSW and Victoria – *Thomas and Naaz Pty Ltd v. Chief Commissioner of State Revenue [2021]* and *Commissioner of State Revenue (Vic) v. The Optical Superstore Pty Ltd [2019]*.

As well as GP clinics, this new interpretation applies to other practices that operate on the business model of tenant practitioners on the premises, such as dentists and allied health practitioners.

The retrospective application of the ruling has resulted in audits of medical practices, creating unexpected payroll tax liabilities in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, including penalties and interest; placing the viability of these businesses at risk.

In turn, this affects access to primary health care in Victoria, as practices risk closure or are seeking to cover their increased payroll tax obligations by charging patients higher out-of-pocket costs. This means reduced access to bulk-billing and further strain on public hospital emergency departments across the state, as patients delay or forgo GP visits due to cost.

### **Other jurisdictions**

In other jurisdictions, public pressure from strong advocacy by stakeholder bodies and state oppositions has resulted in governments introducing amnesties, concessions, or ruling out the tax.

### **The government's change in position**

For more than a year, the Treasurer has insisted there has been no change to the law or interpretation of the law when determining liability for payroll tax, and that the SRO makes assessments on a case-by-case basis.

Meanwhile, GPs and bodies including the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the AMA and the Primary Care Business Council were loudly voicing their concerns about the looming threat to the viability of their businesses and the impact of passing on additional costs to patients on both those individuals and the health system.

Even the Labor federal health minister, Mark Butler, expressed concern at the Victorian government's approach as potentially undermining the Commonwealth's Medicare incentives:

'Payroll tax is a matter for states but I am very worried that the historic investments we've put into Medicare, in response to calls from state governments, will be lost to increase payroll tax obligations by general practices,' Mr Butler said.

Despite repeated assertions from the Victorian government that nothing had changed and so there was no need for any relief, just last week in a remarkable backdown, the Treasurer announced that GP businesses will be granted a 12-month exemption from payroll tax for payments to contractor GPs to June 2025, and from 1 July 2025, the government will provide payroll tax exemption for payments to contractor GPs and employee GPs for providing bulk-billed consultations.

### **Why do we need this bill?**

The exemptions do not go far enough and will leave many medical practices still facing the prospect of high payroll tax bills.

Limiting the exemption to bulk-billing also creates a divide between clinics in communities with higher bulk-billing rates and practices providing consultations that are not bulk-billed.

Medical clinics that have limited or no bulk-billing will continue to be under threat of closing, thousands of patients will still be faced with hikes to co-payments, with a flow-on effect on emergency departments.

Over the last 12 months, the opposition has engaged extensively with key stakeholders, including the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), the Australian Medical Association (AMA), the Australian General Practice Alliance (AGPA), the Primary Care Business Council, booking platform HotDoc, and individual medical practice owners.

All stakeholders consulted have called for the immediate reversal of the SRO ruling to end Labor's unfair payroll tax treatment of medical clinics.

Stakeholders have warned that some clinics will be forced to close, bulk-billing will disappear, and there will be more pressure on already strained emergency departments as patients delay treatment because of increasing barriers to accessing GP services.

A survey by health booking platform HotDoc found:

- 95 per cent of clinics in Victoria would increase patient fees in response to additional payroll tax obligations, with the average increase around \$12 per standard consultation, bringing out-of-pocket costs up to around \$52.
- 28 per cent of patients would make fewer visits to their GP if fees increased and 7 per cent would stop going altogether.

### Summary

Access to affordable and timely primary care is the cornerstone of our health system.

This bill provides certainty for medical practices in relation to their payroll tax liability, preservation of bulk-billing, protection for patients against higher consultation fees and prevents additional stress on the hospital system.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:05): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

### Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I get to the next item, Mr Davis's short-form documents motion, I have a bit of a concern that we may be in breach of the anticipation of debate rule given that Mr Davis's motion for later this morning relates to the same topic as far as the federal government's *Future Gas Strategy* goes. I know Mr Davis is asking two different questions. If this debate is tight about the documents and the reason for the documents, and other speakers stick to that, I do not think we will be offending the anticipation rule.

## *Production of documents*

### Energy policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:06): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the federal government released its *Future Gas Strategy* on 9 May 2024;
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
  - (a) any materials or submissions provided to the federal government by the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources or by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) regarding the development of the *Future Gas Strategy*;

- (b) any materials, including assessments and briefs, provided by DEECA to the Minister for Energy and Resources concerning the *Future Gas Strategy*; and
- (c) any consultancies or work by contractors used to inform submissions to the federal *Future Gas Strategy* process.

President, I appreciate your guidance of course. This is a very narrow motion. It refers to the federal government's gas strategy but seeks a set of documents that are related to that gas strategy. The first set of documents relates to the documents that the state government may or may not have submitted to the Commonwealth government or the Commonwealth minister perhaps or other Commonwealth agencies regarding this gas strategy. We would expect that the Victorian government would prosecute Victoria's position, whatever that may be, in a thoughtful way and would thereby submit to the federal process. It is either the case that material was submitted by the minister or department or it was not. If it was not, I think that is telling. If it was, we want to see it. We think the community is entitled to see what the Commonwealth was presented with by the Victorian government or minister.

We are also looking for any materials, assessments and briefs provided by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to the minister. When the Commonwealth gas strategy came down, it seems likely that the department would have briefed the minister. It would be helpful for the chamber and indeed for the Victorian community – I think it is very much in the public interest – for us to understand what the Victorian government has done, what steps it has undertaken, beyond its public utterances on these matters. If the department has in a formal way and a detailed way provided a brief to the minister, which is what I would expect they would have done, I think it is relevant and important for the chamber and the community to see that as well as, finally, any consultancies or work by contractors used to inform submissions to the federal *Future Gas Strategy* process. Was work done behind the scenes here by a consultant, by a contractor, by other hired help, as it were, to inform the federal process via the state government? Was a decision made, for example, to commission a particular consultancy and thereby use that information to inform what might have been put in front of the federal government or indeed to inform commentary around the federal government's gas strategy?

It is on the record, and I will say more later, that we think there is some merit in parts of the federal strategy. We think that the state strategy, the gas substitution plan, is a very different body of work with a very different focus, and it is this interplay that is important to understand what is going on here. Have the state government put fulsome submissions to the federal government, or have they gone quiet and just allowed the federal government to do its work? I think that is the purpose of this, and it is very much in the public interest. The chamber has clearly got the power to ask for these documents. They should be documents that are easily accessible for the minister – some of them being ministerial briefings – and the minister and her department ought to provide those matters to the chamber to inform the chamber and more broadly the Victorian community.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call Mr McIntosh – I am not too sure if he was in the chamber – we have the potential to breach the anticipation of debate rule, given Mr Davis has got a general and more far-reaching motion around the *Future Gas Strategy*, so can we contain our comments on this one around the documents themselves and the process of the documents.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:11): President, I will do that. It is groundhog day. We are basically here again. The opposition are using this time in Parliament, time that could probably be better spent, asking for documents. As we have seen in the past, sometimes these documents could be found if they simply search on the internet, which is –

**A member** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, that is right; the black box over there is the internet. You could search and find some information. I know that quite often those opposite are struggling to be in this century, let alone in the past century.

**Michael Galea:** Is it goggle?

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, goggle. But I think there could be a little bit more focus on your own policies rather than trying to use these very odd, incorrect methods of trying to obtain information. It is very clear to the Victorian people what our policies are on energy. We have been very up-front and clear with that for decades – unlike yourselves. I have another contribution to make soon, and I think I will explore the policies of those opposite – I say those opposite because we have the Liberals and we have the Nationals. I follow the energy space pretty keenly, and I cannot keep up with what your policies are. Whether it is ripping up farmland for fracking or whether it is putting nuclear reactors in –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, this actually is quite a narrow motion. It is about documents, it is not about a broad spray on farmland and so forth.

**The PRESIDENT:** Yes. I will bring Mr McIntosh back to the documents.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Thank you, President. I actually was starting to stray a little bit. I think the key point is that we are wasting everybody's time with documents that, as we have seen with previous short-form document motions, either are publicly accessible or the government does not have access to – and we are talking about federal documents. I think we can stop wasting everyone's time and get on with telling the Victorian people what we stand for and what we will deliver, and in my next contribution I look forward to exploring that in some detail.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:14): I too will keep my comments on this brief because I will have more to say on this later today. The Greens will be supporting this documents motion; however, I want to qualify our support because we are doing so from a standpoint that I think could not be more starkly different to that of the coalition. We too would be interested in what information and advice Victorian Labor provided to their federal counterparts as they developed their *Future Gas Strategy*. Let me be absolutely clear: the Greens want to see an end to new gas projects and a rapid transition off gas for existing users to 100 per cent renewables. Unlike the opposition, we do not see merit in the *Future Gas Strategy*. It is a total capitulation to the gas lobby, and we can only hope that Victorian Labor put up a good fight against this strategy. Perhaps these documents, which we are supporting the release of in the interests of transparency, can shine some light on that. In any case, as always and as I think we have made absolutely clear, we will not give up our fight on the climate. That means no more coal and gas, and we are very hopeful that the Victorian Labor government share that sentiment and that, as I said, these documents will provide some information about whether they took that position to the federal government.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:15): I am very happy to join my colleagues and make a contribution to the short-form documents motion before us today, calling for the production of documents on the *Future Gas Strategy*. I note from the notice of motion submitted by Mr Davis in this place yesterday that we are in fact noting that the federal government did release the *Future Growth Strategy* on 9 May. I have taken the time since the release of that strategy by the federal minister Madeleine King to read through it in depth. I do have some pretty strong points that I want to make, and I hope that I will have an opportunity to make those later on today as we discuss the motion that Mr Davis has also put forward on the notice paper, but I will just say that I am very happy to say that our government has always been transparent with its process, its policies and its mechanisms.

The work of the Victorian government is in fact laid out fairly clearly in the gas substitution road map, and you will hear more about that when I speak later on today. The truth is that that really lays out what is the work of Victoria and the unique circumstances of Victoria when it comes to our position on gas. The federal government's *Future Gas Strategy* is just that – the federal government is looking at the whole of the nation and its response to gas supply issues. It really looks at creating and supplementing existing export of our gas to our neighbours – the international exports of gas – and such things. But the truth is that, right here, Victoria has been exporting net gas supply to other states

in order to supplement their stockpiles for many, many, many years. Now that the net supply in Victoria is on a downward slide, which has been reported by national organisations as well as our minister for quite some time now, that position is really no longer sustainable. The federal gas strategy is just that – it is a federal approach – and it does not I think give due respect to the Victorian situation. I know that I will have more to say on the position that I hold when it comes to the federal gas strategy.

**David Davis:** We're part of Australia.

**Sheena WATT:** But we are a little different – we do not send it off to other parts of the world here. We supply Victorians and Australians with gas for their home and for the businesses that need it. Whilst I can go on about that, I am conscious, President, that you did make a ruling earlier to stick to the documents that are being sought today. I will in fact perhaps leave my notes there and look forward to an opportunity to speak more about this as the day progresses and we move to the other notices of motion that are on the notice paper for us.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Health services

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:19): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that in relation to the proposed amalgamations of Victoria's health services:
  - (a) several media reports have confirmed that the Victorian government commissioned a report to address the growing financial issues in Victoria's public hospitals and potential solutions;
  - (b) the Secretary of the Department of Health Professor Euan Wallace confirmed at a hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on 22 May 2024 that a report was provided to the Victorian government in early May 2024 around the issue of hospital consolidations; and
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council by 19 June 2024 all briefs, advice and reports provided to the Minister for Health and to the Department of Health around recommendations, practical implementation and feasibility of amalgamating, consolidating or merging, however described, Victoria's health services in both regional and metropolitan areas.

This is an important motion because there is so much uncertainty within the community around what is going to happen to our health services. We know that the government did a review of the health services plan in December 2022, and in that review at the time it did have suggested health service partnerships. They are highlighted into eight areas with eight lead hospitals, and in those areas it showed where hospitals would fall and how that would happen. For instance, north-east metro, under the lead of Austin Health, had Eastern Health, the Mercy Hospital for Women, Northern Health, St Vincent's Hospital, the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and Forensicare. In south-east metro Monash would be the lead and it would be responsible for the Alfred, Calvary Health Care Bethlehem and Peninsula Health, and the list goes on. I will not, in interest of time, read those out, but the point is this is what the government was planning or had advice to do.

We know in the minister's letter of 8 May, just after the budget was handed down, that she made it very clear to CEOs and boards that the department had set a form of directives and that she would operate under the act to ensure that the government's direction was followed through. That letter says a number of things. It states:

... the 2023–24 Statement of Priorities, provides immediate financial support to ensure that your health service has the necessary liquidity to fulfil its short-term obligations. The specific level of financial support and the resulting operating target allocated to your health service for the 2023–24 period is also outlined in your Statement of Priorities. Financial support is provided based on forecast financial information, and no further funding will be provided.

There is a lot of uncertainty for many health services come 1 July, and that is in just a few weeks time. What this documents motion is very reasonably asking is for the report that Professor Wallace referred



to, which the department has, to be released in the interests of transparency and certainty for these health services.

There is a loss of service already happening since the amalgamations. With Kyneton into Northern people have had their surgery cancelled and been told, 'That hospital now doesn't conduct that,' so they are on this extended waiting list. This is happening now. The CEOs, those people that support the hospitals and the communities themselves have been completely left in the dark by the Allan Labor government in relation to their plans to amalgamate services, and that is not good enough. This is a simple documents motion in relation to what I think the entire Victorian community deserves to see, and I would urge that the government provide the documents within the timeframe I have set out.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:23): I rise to speak on notice of motion 438 put forward by Ms Crozier in relation to certain documents pertaining to health services in this state and, I note, throwing out hypotheticals that Ms Crozier has done and making assumptions and assertions –

**Georgie Crozier:** What, are you saying that services have not been lost?

**Michael GALEA:** I think it is timely, and I will pick you up on that interjection, Ms Crozier. I am happy to reference the incredible investment that this government has made in health services in this state over the last 10 years and indeed in this year's budget, with \$13 billion in this budget and the \$8.8 billion investment that we have also seen into our state's hospital system.

I note that Ms Crozier's documents request comes in light of comments made at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on 22 May, last week. As I mentioned yesterday, it was good to have Ms Crozier in the room. I cannot say that too many of her colleagues in the shadow cabinet did attend. A few did, but not too many. It was good to at least have you there, Ms Crozier, and you certainly made your presence known and heard as well. It was good to see you there.

What I would say is that this is a government that has delivered and invested in Victoria's health system in metropolitan Melbourne and in regional Victoria and will continue to do so. We will continue to do so in a way that is putting patients first and making sure that patients are supported and looked after as much as they possibly can be. For me to come up and say this, I do so on the back of significant investment and significant reforms that have already been made. If you look at the 18-month period just up to March 2024, we have seen 274,000 patients pass through our innovative virtual emergency department. That is 274,000 people either not contributing to a wait at their local emergency room or indeed getting that health care that they might otherwise not have taken up. The virtual emergency department is an incredible initiative, and I strongly encourage all Victorians to take it up.

We also of course remain a nationwide leader when it comes to women's health, and we have got the pain inquiry which is underway right now and which has already received well over 7000 responses. In this place of course I have already talked about the priority primary care centres, where again, the state government is stepping in to fill the void of a lack of investment that we saw after nine years of chaotic coalition federal government. We are investing by providing free nursing degrees to people that want to take up the vocation in this state as well as attracting nurses and doctors from overseas. You only have to look over somewhere like the UK and look at their papers to see constant reports of their National Health Service doctors and nurses leaving the country, again under conservative mismanagement. They are coming to Australia, coming to Victoria in particular, because they have spent 14 years under a conservative government and they know what it is like to go through that underinvestment.

Ms Crozier referred to regional health services as well. Whilst I can point to the huge number of hospitals that have been either built or significantly expanded by this government from metropolitan Melbourne through to regional Victoria, I could also of course point to the three private hospitals that have been purchased to be converted to state surgery centres – in Frankston, Bellbird in Blackburn

and in Mildura. But also if you were to go and ask people in Eildon, in Koroit, in Mortlake, in Murtoa, they would tell you that it was a coalition government that closed their hospital. It is the same if you ask people in Red Cliffs, in Macarthur, in Clunes, in Beeac, in Birregurra, in Lismore, in Elmore and in Waranga. These are all towns across Victoria that have suffered from cuts and closures to their hospitals under previous Liberal–National coalition governments. So regional Victorians, particularly in these towns, see through these attempts by Ms Crozier, they see through the deflections, because they know that this is a government that has invested and expanded in our state’s metropolitan and regional hospitals whilst those opposite only have a reputation of closing them. So for this reason, whilst I will not be opposing the motion today, I point out the sheer hypocrisy of those opposite when they try and lecture anyone else in this place on their record on health.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:28): The Greens will be supporting this motion, both on transparency grounds and more fundamentally I think as an issue that really does need some more robust public discourse around it. Amalgamation or consolidation of hospitals is clearly on the government’s agenda. It is one of the worst kept secrets, I think, in this state at the moment. It has the potential to be one of the biggest health reforms this state has seen in decades, and yet there has been almost no genuine public discourse about this issue from the government. As someone who cares deeply about our public health system, this is really concerning. Instead what we have got are leaks, press reports and rumours, and that has left many health services and communities, particularly in rural and regional areas, uncertain and jumping to conclusions about what this is going to mean for service access in the future.

People are particularly fearful that this is going to lead to the closure of services, again in rural and regional areas. This fear makes sense, because it is logical to think that an amalgamation will lead to efficiency drives and in turn services will be cut to areas where it is most expensive to provide care, typically in rural and regional areas. We know that providing those services can be more expensive and that at least in theory with scale and in larger services these services can be delivered more cheaply. So it is understandable, this fear that is out there. The reality is there may be certain services or aspects of the health system that would benefit from some consolidation or amalgamation, but we are yet to hear any clear rationale from the government as to why this needs to be done or to justify the way they propose to go about this based on the information that is being leaked out there. Is this about saving money? If so, what modelling supports this? Open up the conversation. Talk about it. Provide this information. Provide a justification. There is plenty of commentary out there that would challenge the idea that amalgamations save money, particularly amalgamation of smaller hospitals. You might save, in the long run, some money by amalgamating larger services, but what it fails to recognise is that you need to make a huge investment up-front to undertake a health reform of this scale. But there has been no conversation about that.

Perhaps it is about improving service delivery. Again, if this is the basis, where is the evidence? It is possible that amalgamations could deliver better services for some regions, but it is difficult to know whether this is what is driving the government, because they are not being open, they are not talking about this. Perhaps it is just simpler to have fewer services. We have over 70 services. It looks nicer on paper if you have got fewer of them. But I think we need to be striving for more than something that looks good on paper. An arrangement that can be carved up neatly ignores existing partnerships, referral pathways and community-health-seeking behaviour that exists within our community and works really well.

There is much more to be said about this subject, but in essence we believe that such a significant reform with the potential for far-reaching consequences deserves far more transparency and public discussion than what we are seeing from the government at the moment. I really would encourage the government not only to release the documents being called for here but to start being more open about this agenda around health service amalgamations. The information is already getting out there in the public, and I think you would do yourselves a service to start providing a really strong rationale to the public for why you feel this is the pathway we need to be going down in Victoria.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:32): I rise to speak to Ms Crozier's motion in relation to Victoria's health services and seeking some documents. I think it is pretty clear from the track record of this government that we believe in our health system and we support our health system. The fundamental purpose of our health system is to give Victorians the care that they need. That is what our health system should be providing. That is what the priority of our health minister has absolutely been focused on. Victorians deserve a health system that is delivering them the care they need in the right place at the right time. As the Minister for Health has said repeatedly, the purpose of the health services plan, which this motion seeks further information about, is to understand the challenges facing our health system and, on the advice that that plan is giving the government, how we can best maintain the optimal design of our public health system so that it is doing that focused work on patients.

Obviously Victoria and Melbourne have changed and continue to change dramatically. We have seen that in the communities that we represent – the changes that are flowing through our communities, who lives where and the issues that confront them. It is only a sensible and prudent thing, particularly when we are looking at how we can provide the communities we represent with the care that they need, to be continually looking at how that system performs. That is exactly what the health minister is doing with the health services plan: focusing on the patient outcomes that we need.

But it has been very clear – the minister has been very clear – that, unlike the Liberals, the Labor government will not be closing hospitals. The Labor government will not be selling off hospitals. Unlike the Liberals, we will not be privatising our hospitals. Our record is one of investment – putting money into the front line where it is needed. \$13 billion in 2024–25 will support the delivery of world-class health care in Victoria and the provision of better healthcare facilities for Victorians wherever they live. That is just one budget on top of years and years of budget investments in our healthcare system.

As has been previously mentioned in the debate, our government has an outstanding track record at building new hospitals, at upgrading our existing hospitals, of buying privatised hospitals and putting them back into public hands. That is what we did in Frankston, that is what we did at Bellbird and that is what we did in Mildura; we took hospitals that had been privatised or were private and brought them into the public hand. What we are doing now is ensuring that the health system overall is best structured, is best designed, to be focused on meeting the ever-changing healthcare and patient needs of Victorians. That is absolutely what we are doing. This health minister is focused on ensuring that our healthcare system is delivering Victorians the health care that they need, that it is focused on improving frontline services and focused on improving patient outcomes. We are interested in what goes on at the front line as the absolute, most important thing that should be determining how our healthcare system operates and ensuring that the way that the system is organised, the way the system is focused and structured, is absolutely designed to meet the emerging and ever-changing needs of Victorians and their health care. For that reason we think the health minister, particularly in this area, is doing an exceptional job.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Energy policy**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:37): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the federal government's *Future Gas Strategy*, released on 9 May 2024, diverges significantly from the Victorian government's *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, including in the importance it accords to the freedom of choice of consumers to use gas, as shown under guiding principle 4, which states that 'Households will continue to have a choice over how their energy needs are met,' whereas the *Gas Substitution Roadmap* seeks to deny choice to consumers by having already banned gas connections to

developments requiring a planning permit, including new estates, and banned rebates on gas appliances;  
and

- (2) calls on the Victorian government to urgently review its *Gas Substitution Roadmap* in light of the strategy released by the federal government.

There is a spat that has occurred between Minister D'Ambrosio and Minister King, and it is both a stylistic spat in the sense that there are obviously personalities involved, but there is substantive basis to that spat too. The fact is that these two Labor ministers are at odds. The federal minister has got very significantly different views from the state minister here, Ms D'Ambrosio. Ms D'Ambrosio has been in charge of the energy portfolio now for 10 years, and what we have seen is chaos ensue. There have been no new gas exploration licences committed to by this government since it came to power. We have a looming shortage because the state government has failed to bring on new gas and failed to provide the gas that is needed for industry, for households, for businesses. I want to be quite clear here that we see a significant role for gas, which is about choice for consumers in their households. It is about the importance of having gas available for small businesses. It is also about the importance of the role of gas for those gas-intensive industries. Some of the hard-to-abate industries that use gas both as an input but also as an important energy source need gas as a support. We have started to see the risk coming to the fore of Victoria losing significant businesses – significant gas-using businesses but also others, because the cost of gas has been escalating because the state government has failed to bring on supply.

The Victorian government has tried to do everything it could. It had the moratorium going forward, but then it said, 'We're going to have scientists look at this.' They gave them narrow terms of reference. They came back and said, 'Well, inside our narrow terms of reference there's not much, but we know from what industry says that there are enormous amounts of gas available in this state.'

We know even as recently as yesterday the head of Cooper Energy made clear points about the availability of gas in this state. The *Age*, of all papers, counterpoised her comments – Jane Norman's comments – with the comments of the Victorian minister, and they could not have been more stark in their contrast. They could not have been more stark in their intent. It is clear that gas is available. The industry experts tell us that gas is available. I have just come back from Perth, where I was at the Australian Energy Producers Conference and Exhibition. There were almost 3000 delegates at that conference. I went to many workshops and presentations, and it is clear that gas can be got into this state to underpin the ongoing role for gas in reaching whatever transition we are able to achieve by 2050. The target is there, and we will need gas as part of that even beyond 2050, because it is net zero, and it may well be that gas plays a role in firming and peaking energy generation well beyond that time.

We understand the inherent challenges with renewables. Renewables are clearly going to play a bigger role, but there is clearly an inherent challenge with some of the renewables in ensuring that the intermittency is managed by power sources. In this case in my view the most significant of them will be gas. If you presume, as this government has announced and as has been announced publicly, that the first of our coal comes off in 2028 and then again further in 2035, there will be a need for some additional capacity to actually make sure that we have got a viable system that goes forward into the future.

This has been recognised by the federal government, and I actually think there is a lot to commend that federal paper. Not everything in it I would agree with, and I would quibble with certain matters, but there is a lot to commend it. On the other hand you have got the stark decision of the Victorian government to try and close down gas at every turn. They have already got gas banned on new estates. We know that that is beginning to have an effect. I met with senior officials from Wodonga council the other day, and there are clearly impacts already occurring on industrial estates where gas has been provided to the edge of the estate, often with public money, significant public resources, and now the ability to connect into that estate is under threat. That is true with residential estates too. It is true with the government's decisions on banning appliance rebates. We know the government actually wants to

go further and they want to ban gas appliances full stop. So when your gas appliance breaks, you will be banned from replacing it with a new gas appliance. That is where they want to go. We know where Lily D'Ambrosio wants to go. She is a hard ideologue, who is determined to ban gas, to force gas out, and she thinks that this is a better way forward.

We do not agree with it, and of course there are perverse outcomes here. If you shift from gas now to electricity generated by coal, you will have a higher carbon dioxide footprint than you would otherwise. There is a perverse matter that is operating here in Victoria now. But looking at the longer run, the federal government has, I think for some of them through gritted teeth, realised that gas is going to be an important part of the future, that gas is going to be an important peaking or firming part of the future with electricity generation. But I would also argue that it is more than that, that it is important for households to have access to gas. There are cultural matters. There is also a series of basic system theory points that would, say, let us make sure that you have got a proper set of arrangements in place so that if one part of the system is in trouble, you are not left with nothing at all.

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** That does seem to me to be common sense as well. The state government has been peddling information that electrified properties are in some way cheaper. Even at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the other day the minister had the solar house there. I know Acting President Galea was there, and he will have the solar connected to the electrified house but not connected to the gas house. Where is the replacement cost for all the appliances? When you put the replacement cost in, the economics of it shift massively. Gas appliances are cheaper, and there is another point: most of the gas appliances, more than 50 per cent, are made in Australia. A much smaller percentage, perhaps as small as 5 per cent, of the electricity appliances are made in Australia. We are de-industrialising through this process. We are de-industrialising, we are exporting our jobs, we are sending them overseas, we are sending real, good-paying manufacturing jobs overseas with this strategy.

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Look, I had somebody in my office the other day who had received a federal government grant on evaporative air conditioning and ways forward on evaporative air conditioning. The Lily D'Ambrosio model says you do not have gas in the winter and evaporative air conditioning in the summer – you have a single reverse-cycle air conditioner up there. But of course the evaporative air conditioning is about a quarter of the energy use of the heat pump model. So through the whole summer period, you are pumping out more carbon dioxide because the usage of the reverse-cycle air conditioner is much greater. Now, there is nothing in the government modelling that deals with these sorts of shifts, nothing at all. The government modelling is dodgy. The government modelling is not up to scratch. The government modelling, in simple terms, compares apples and oranges as it were, in the old-fashioned parlance. They are not an even comparison, and they do not include solar in the right way because many gas houses have got solar. It might surprise the minister, but a lot of houses with gas have also got solar. There is no rule that says that if you have got a gas property, you cannot put a solar panel on your roof and you cannot use the solar to lower your costs.

The point here is the state government's gas substitution road map is in chaos. We know that groups like the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Industry Group are terribly worried about what it is doing to the industry. We notice that groups like Seeley are now leaving the state. Even the tomato manufacturing and canning operations in Echuca are looking to leave the state because of the issues of costs and gas. These are very, very real issues.

The federal government laid out a number of principles, and I think it is worth – I am conscious of my time here – laying out some of the principles:

Australia is committed to supporting global emissions reductions ... and ... zero emissions by 2050. Gas production and use must be optimised through the transition and residual use must be abated or offset to achieve this economy-wide commitment.

Gas must remain affordable for Australian ... consumers. We know what has happened in Victoria: gas went up 22 per cent last year and electricity up 28 per cent. There were massive increases in costs for families. Affordability is a real problem.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Your government, the Labor government of which Ms D'Ambrosio is the minister, has got an absolutely chaotic way forward here. They have not laid out a sensible, reasonable way forward on this. Costs have gone up –

**Tom McIntosh:** Well, what's yours?

**David DAVIS:** Well, we are saying there is a greater role for gas. We are saying: go out and search for gas. We are saying we would give gas exploration permits, and you have not. You have not given a single permit for exploration since 2014. The last permit was given in 2013 under the previous government. You are asking what we would do; well, I am telling you what we would do.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Order! Please speak through the Chair, Mr Davis.

**David DAVIS:** Acting President, I have been provoked and I should not take the bait.

I quote:

New sources of gas supply are needed to meet demand during the economy-wide transition.

We could not agree more – that is the federal government's principle. They say:

Reliable gas supply will gradually and inevitably support a shift towards higher-value and non-substitutable gas uses.

This is federal principle 4:

Households will continue to have a choice over how their energy needs are met.

No, they are not going to ban gas in households. They are not going to ban gas, like we have got in Victoria — draconian, almost Stalinist stuff to actually ban –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Almost. It is pretty heavy, isn't it – banning the choice of gas, banning rebates.

**Tom McIntosh:** On a point of order, Acting President, I think Mr Davis needs to tone it down little bit – like, quite substantially.

**Renee Heath:** On the point of order, Acting President, that is not a point of order.

**Tom McIntosh:** I do not want to start going into your use of the word 'Stalin', but I think you can just tone it down a bit, mate.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** There is no point of order.

**David DAVIS:** Principle 5:

Gas and electricity markets must adapt to remain fit for purpose throughout the energy transformation.

Point 6:

Australia is, and will remain, a reliable trading partner for energy, including Liquefied Natural Gas ... and low emission gases.

They go on to talk about things that the Commonwealth government can do, but there are things the state government can do. I do not disagree with the essence of some of these principles. I think they are on the right track compared to where the state government is. It is for that reason that I have brought this motion. It is a very simple motion: it says the federal government's paper came down, we have

got a state government gas substitution road map, they are at loggerheads – they are butting heads – and we have got two different strategies heading in different directions. I think the federal strategy is the better strategy, and I have made that point clearly and publicly and widely. But I think now, because the federal strategy has come down, whatever the spat, whatever the personal feelings of the minister here, she needs to get over herself, get over her spat with Madeleine King and actually then settle down and review the gas substitution road map in the light of the new federal strategy, which heads in a different direction. It says we do need gas for part of our transition. It says that transition requires gas – it requires more gas and it requires new sources of gas. It requires gas also to support electricity generation for peaking – for supporting the inevitable fluctuations of the renewables that are coming into the system.

**Tom McIntosh:** You've stopped talking about base load now. You've figured that out.

**David DAVIS:** I have always talked of it.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I tell you what: you ought to go and talk to your minister and you ought to say, 'Let's tear up the road map and let's produce a document that is more consistent with the federal document, that is not butting heads with the federal document.' Let us get Lily D'Ambrosio to step back, get over her ego, actually go and sit down with Madeleine King, have a discussion and talk to the gas industry. The gas industry – and I have talked to many of them – actually think Lily D'Ambrosio is way, way out of her depth and way out of where the state should be. Lily D'Ambrosio needs to go and talk to the gas industry and actually reformat this *Gas Substitution Roadmap*. She needs to work with the industry and with the federal government to devise a sensible plan. Hence my call for an immediate review.

Others might say – and I am anticipating perhaps what my Greens colleagues might say – they prefer the *Gas Substitution Roadmap* to the federal program. They may also point to other deficiencies in the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*. Either way it would lead to a sensible position to review that *Gas Substitution Roadmap* in light of the new federal material and the new federal decision. They are very important decisions that have been made by the federal government, and some of them I am sure were ideologically not easy, but they do recognise the facts. They recognise that the facts have changed. As Madeleine King said, these need to be fact-driven, analysis-driven matters, not ideological matters. We do not need the heavy unadulterated ideology that has driven these energy steps in Victoria. That is the point. In that circumstance, I would say this is a very moderate motion recognising the two different approaches, which are now at loggerheads, and in light of the federal document I think the state government needs to go back to the drawing board, talk to industry and review its paper.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:57): I very happy to stand and speak against this motion. I am glad that we have a good-sized audience to sit here and listen to this and get a very good understanding that the Liberals have not changed in 2½ decades when it comes to action on climate change. Mr Davis stood over there and talked about ideology, ideology, ideology. We know where the ideology is absolutely fixed. It is fixed to the far right of your party.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tom McINTOSH:** I am going to come to the topic, but I want to start with principles. I want to start with principles and values. That is where I am going to start. Last year temperatures around the world were up by 1.5 degrees. We are heading to that becoming the new average, and then we are heading to 2 degrees. We do not hear you lot talk about that, because you are ideologically opposed to dealing with the science.

We are no longer talking about future generations, we are talking about generations right now. We are talking about weather events that come through and smash our farmers. Our consumers go to the supermarket, and they are paying for that with their groceries when they go to the supermarket. We

know that insurance bills are rising. Because of these weather events, insurers are having to raise the costs. It is Victorians, it is Australians and it is people all around the world in these events that are suffering. What do you lot do when something like that happens? When freak winds come through, you blame renewables for the fact that powerlines are snapped in half. You will seize any opportunity to muddy the water. I will come to the politics a bit later on, but all you want to do is muddy the water on this debate. I will go into nuclear when we get down there in a little bit. If we want to talk about energy policies and we want to see differing of opinion between a federal and a state party, we cannot even get two of you on that side to agree on what your energy policies are, let alone the feds and the state.

This side has been very, very clear for a very, very long time. We acknowledge the science of climate change, and we will act on it. The state has had –

**Bev McArthur:** Oh!

**Tom McIntosh:** What are you ‘oh’-ing about? Climate change is the science that we have to deal with, and we are getting on with doing it. We have been fortunate to have abundant sources of energy, being coal and gas in this state, but we know we cannot go on using them, and with gas we know that the volumes of gas simply are not there. You are sitting over there talking about extracting more gas. Where are you going to get it from? Where are you going to get this gas from? We have surveyed the state; we spent \$40 million surveying the state and the volumes of gas that we once had are no longer there. The comments you were making before about the fact that people are already being hit by these gas bans, that the boogiemer is coming in to rip out the gas plates from people’s houses, it is all utter hyperbole. Let me just say that. It is the planning for new residential homes that have not even been impacted yet, yet you are screaming bloody murder about all these things that are happening. Basically every point you touched on in your contribution, Mr Davis, was just this sort of wound-up – words that I cannot use in here.

We are getting out in front and protecting consumers because as those gas supplies dwindle – and we know if we are talking about 180 petajoules or something per annum that we need and our supplies are diminishing as our wells, particularly those off Gippsland, are diminishing and the wells have to close – then we need to get on the front foot to ensure that we do not have whether it is Victorian households or industry needlessly paying huge amounts of money for gas when there is the opportunity there to electrify. We have had a solid policy and delivery of renewable energy projects. We are now at 40 per cent of the grid coming from renewable electricity and in just 11 years that will be 95 per cent.

Now, we acknowledge there will be a need for peaking from gas and there will be a need for industry to use gas, and that is why it is important that we conserve what we have for where it is needed, unlike those opposite who want to bury their heads in the sand, show that conservative brand of politics where you do not get on and face up to challenges or issues that come. You just wish things would be the same forever. You just look in the rearview mirror rather than looking through the windscreen, and that is all you ever do on that side.

We acknowledge the problem. We see there are solutions. Mr Davis is talking about only 5 per cent of heat pumps being made in this country. That is why we are getting on – if you want to talk about federal politics – making things in Australia, supporting massive new industries that are going to support this state and this nation to move to renewables to move to net zero. That is what we are laying out. We are seeing all around the world the massive investment, whether it is in America, whether it is in Europe, the Inflation Reduction Act. These different policies that are being put in place are seeing massive industries stimulated: China, electric vehicles, 50 per cent of their vehicle market. Of course Mr Morrison and his spin team told everyone that it would be the end of the Aussie weekend. The tradies I talk to say if they get to have 80 to 90 kilowatts in the back of their utes and charge all their batteries on it, when they pull up at a campsite, they will not need a powered site – you just pull up



and you are there, you are self-sufficient, you do not need to lug generators around. You do not need to do all that. SES units are using battery operated jaws of life. Electric is where things are going.

So rather than stick the head in the sand, let us have a look at where we are going, prepare for it and ensure that we do not have consumers paying far, far more than what is needed down the track unnecessarily. This dream Mr Davis has about the fact that there is this abundance of gas that we are being denied from accessing is absolutely bizarre. So I think what the people of Victoria want is they want the Liberals and they want the Nationals to come clean on what their energy policy is. I know there has been an abundance of policies over the last 20 years. You could probably write a kids' book on the magical journey of the coalition energy policies changing every six to 12 months. Is it fracking? Do you want to go in and rip up farms? Do you want to go in and rip up farms and poison the aquifers to get the gas out? Is that your plan? Is it nuclear? Do we want to be burying that nuclear waste on farms? Do we want to be risking our pristine farmland by having nuclear reactors?

I follow the energy space quite clearly, but I am losing track of where you all are, where your feds are, where the Nats are and where the Libs are. I cannot keep up. Between small modular nuclear reactors that you used to think existed and were great, and then realised, 'Oh, no, small modular nuclear reactors don't exist anywhere in the world. Maybe we actually have to have something that's real and substantial,' and now it is large-scale nuclear reactors. It has taken probably 18 months just to try and land what your position is on nuclear. How on earth do you think you are actually going to build nuclear reactors if your own parties cannot agree on what it is? And what are the state Liberals going to do? Are you going to regulate for nuclear in this state? Tell the Victorian people what you want to do.

Mr Davis, you stood there with Mr Pesutto last week and said there was no intention of it. The Nationals had their conference in Bendigo, and we are led to believe that they are backing nuclear in all the way. The fault lines between the Liberals and the Nationals are running very, very deep, and the people of Victoria deserve to know where your fracking will go, where your nuclear reactors will go and if you have a plan at all for energy in this state.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:07): Let me read into the Parliament's *Hansard* some comments from some of the major energy producers – energy powerhouses – in this region. We have got Beach Energy chief executive Brett Woods. Brett has said:

Beach encourages governments to work together to ensure that approvals are timely and efficient as well as showing leadership to explain the important role of gas in supporting renewables, supporting jobs in existing industries and providing a more affordable and reliable source of energy.

Australian Energy Producers, a lobby group for the gas industry – no shock – accuses the Victorian government of creating uncertainty, uncertainty that will slow investment and the development of new projects. The energy producers say:

The state has abundant onshore gas supplies. But they will not be developed until the government provides a policy and regulatory environment that can give confidence to gas companies to invest in exploration and development.

This is Peter Kos, the group's director. There is nothing with greater clarity than that.

I have heard arguments today, and I thank Mr Davis for bringing this motion forward. It is a very important motion for my electorate of Eastern Victoria and the gas fields in the Otway and Gippsland basins. But there has been such rhetoric it is comical from those on the other side. From 2014 to 2021 this government banned – ideologically banned – onshore natural conventional gas, and we are paying the price. We are paying the price for that. Onshore natural gas – indeed the only licences for fracking actually occurred under a Labor Party. I am just putting that on the record.

We know that there has been a huge ongoing spat between Minister D'Ambrosio and the federal resources minister, Minister King. How uncomfortable must this be for members in this Labor Party, for members of Parliament who are highly stressed for their local communities – for families who are struggling to pay their cost-of-living normal bills, struggling to pay their electricity bills, struggling to

pay their gas bills on any given day? And we have seen the Essential Services Commission talk to the increasing gas prices in recent times of up above 20 per cent. In the last 12 months we have seen that impact. A 20 per cent increase when there is a cost-of-living crisis, when rents are going up, only adds to the pain that our local people on the street in our communities are feeling. Then you also have certain communities where of course because of the Labor Party's ban on gas appliances in new buildings – new homes and apartment blocks – the impact that that is having is also on jobs in our fine state. These things can only compromise opportunity, compromise investment and create another rod for (a) the taxpayer and (b) families and those who are living very close to the poverty line.

Over my time we have spoken a lot about gas in the Gippsland region, and I know – and we have heard it referenced today – that the then Premier about eight years ago decided to have an inquiry, put \$40 million on the table, had some geologists et cetera, and I am sure they are very fine, but their terms of reference were very narrow. Indeed you cannot find extensive pathways and deposits if you are not enabled through their actual terms of reference to have a look. But even at the time, this Victorian gas program, this narrow focus, said that there is going to be anywhere around 830 petajoules of commercially feasible onshore conventional gas. That was back in about 2021 the government knew that. Developing gas would supplement Victoria's diminishing domestic supplies and support regional jobs and economic development over a number of years.

We on this side, the Nationals and the Liberals, support economic development and regional jobs. The production of resources could generate millions of dollars and create up to 6500 jobs in the life span, and the south-west and Gippsland would be the main regions to benefit. Well, even this inquiry, this report that had a limited focus, is saying there is gas out there. You have Beach Energy, you have other key market stakeholders, saying that there is energy trapped underneath our Gippsland Basin and Otway Basin, and this has to be a pathway forward.

We know there is a target – and we support that target – of net zero by 2050, and gas has to be part of that transitional arrangement. We see when there are incidents – high weather situations and storms and the like – and for whatever reason there is a compromised state, gas peaking plants kick in. That is the truth – gas peaking plants kick in. If this government has such a bent to shut down industry and ward off investment, then they are only going to get worse and we are going to see blackouts. Indeed we had the Australian Energy Market Operator speak only recently about the inevitability of blackouts moving forward. I care about jobs in the Latrobe Valley, I care about jobs in Eastern Victoria Region, and this is an opportunity for those jobs. We see the federal government, we see its gas future strategy, and it has come out with many opportunities and many comments that we can actually abide by – in fact we endorse them. But then we have this ideological government, this Lily D'Ambrosio – she is against anything that is sane and sensible. We know that she was a driver in the closure of our native timber industry. Guess what that does – it captures carbon. It stores it. Over 35 per cent of any wood, dressed timber or the like, is stored carbon, and it renews that and renews that and renews that. That is actually sensible policy. This government, through the now energy and former environment minister, has been the architect of so much pain in our gas strategy, in our environmental situations, in our job losses, and now this gas strategy of the government is just underhand.

We see the government in its own substitution road map talk about hydrogen. Well, hydrogen is one thing that we really like talking about in Gippsland and in the Latrobe Valley. In fact there have been huge investments: one, by the feds; two, this still current government – opportunities there; and through a Japanese consortium about gas via coal. They have come on board and said it is viable and they are looking for pathways. They are looking to invest \$2 billion in this pathway. This government is saying hydrogen, but it is picking winners and losers. What we say, what I say, is that this government should be agnostic about the technology and work towards environmental outcomes – work towards net zero by 2050 but work towards sustainability of supply. I do not say 'cheap supply' anymore, I just say 'reliability' and 'affordability' of electricity supply and energy supply. There does need to be a mix.

This government is po-faced about its opportunities. It is shutting down gas when there is a world-class natural resource both onshore and still offshore. This government should not be casting it aside. It should be for the sake of families, for those on the poverty line, for jobs in my region, for jobs in the Otway Basin as well and, not only that, for manufacturing. We do see that Qenos is looking to exit, we do see that Seeley is exiting, and tomato producers in areas like that of my dear colleague Gaele Broad in the north there are looking to exit because they simply cannot afford to do business without a secure gas supply.

One final thing: in the Latrobe Valley we have got energy from waste from the paper manufacturer ready to go, ready and roaring. That will reduce the gas supply, because it is heavily dependent on gas.

I support this motion. I thank Mr Davis for bringing it forward.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:17): I like talking about gas, but one of the things is that this government has been dragged along by the Greens and these environmentalists into this sort of doomsday cult mentality. They act as though, 'If we only tax a little bit more and if we get dragged along to provide more corporate welfare for the renewables industry, somehow Victoria will change planetary weather systems'. I can tell you this: whatever change we make, it is not even a rounding error in the scheme of things. But even worse than Labor getting dragged along by the Greens is the coalition getting dragged along by Labor – everything that Labor do, they do to try to scare the coalition into doing stuff.

They did it with the fracking ban. Coal seam gas was banned; rather ridiculously it was put into our constitution to ban it. What an absolutely ridiculous thing. I imagine there are many MPs on the Labor side who even thought that was ridiculous. And now we have this silly pointscore thing of trying to scare the coalition about the fracking ban, which they do not want to do. I tell you what: I do. I want coal seam gas. I want the gas to flow because I care about Victorians more than sacrificing the prosperity of Australians and Victorians because of some negligible impact on climate change. It is absolutely crazy.

We have got to start putting Victoria first, and the way to do that is by letting energy be produced, not having bans on coal seam gas, not having bans on nuclear energy and not having these stupid scare campaigns to try and scare people that the Liberal Party wants to put nuclear reactors everywhere. I wish they would say that; I wish they would, but they have not. I wish they would say that they support coal seam gas, but they do not. But I do. What we need to do in energy is to let all technologies be on the table, and this idea that we are going to get rid of gas while we have got renewables is absolutely ridiculous. Even Labor acknowledges this. We need gas peaking plants to make up for the fact that wind and solar do not produce all the time. The idea that we are going to have these massive batteries that will take over from gas is just fantasy. It is never going to happen. The batteries will only work for stabilisation, they will never replace gas. It is not going to happen. No-one in the world has done it, right?

If you want to decarbonise, we already know how to do it. If we look at the countries that have done it, they have done it with a combination of hydro and nuclear. No-one has done it any other way. Some countries have done it because they have got massive hydro systems, but we cannot – you know, I do not think the Greens are going to start wanting to build more dams in Victoria. People were talking about pumped hydro a while ago, until they started looking at the maps where you could build hydro and found it involved flooding national parks and this sort of thing. I do not think anyone is going to be supporting that any time soon. But coal seam gas – we need more exploration permits, we need more gas to be produced. Otherwise we are going to end up deindustrialising this state and we are going to end up with large power prices. All of these scare campaigns about coal seam gas and nuclear – let me tell you, the people in Frankston and Dandenong, they are not going to be worried about that when they get their power bills or when the lights go out. What they care about is trying to get by day to day and pay their bills, pay their gas bill, pay their electricity bill.

And another thing, this ban on new gas has got nothing to do with electrification and this sort of thing. What Labor is worried about is the gas supply, and they want to restrict consumption of gas in this state because they are worried, because they have screwed up frankly. They have screwed up the gas production, and they want to reduce the number of consumers. Reducing the number of consumers, as we can see, could mean factories shutting down – that is one way to do it. Stopping people cooking with gas is another way to do it.

Another thing – and there has been research into this; I know that the state government has been funding research into it, but they do not seem to be very interested in implementing it – is mixing hydrogen into the gas supply. I have spoken with scientists who are doing research into this. One of the big problems is you need to test all the appliances first to see what sort of level of hydrogen they can handle to make sure they are safe. You need to test every gas appliance on the market.

**A member:** How many years would that take?

**David LIMBRICK:** Well, they are already doing it.

*Members interjecting.*

**David LIMBRICK:** They reckon 10 per cent easily. They reckon 10 per cent is no problem, probably 20 per cent. 10 per cent is no trouble is what I have been told when I have spoken to scientists working on this. You can put 10 per cent into the gas supply.

**A member** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** Yes. Let us do it. And we will be producing gas out east, hopefully, once the Japanese consortium starts producing it to send to Japan.

**Sarah Mansfield** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** They are making it out of coal, yes. I will take up the interjection from Dr Mansfield. Yes, they are making it out of coal, but so what? Who cares? We do not care. There is some idea that coal is bad, fossil fuels are bad. Fossil fuels are what made Western civilisation rich and prosperous, right? This idea that –

**Sarah Mansfield** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** Maybe the Greens are willing to sacrifice the prosperity of Victoria for a negligible impact on global climate change, but I am not. What we want is maximum energy production, maximum prosperity and cheap energy for this state so that we can re-industrialise and start having factories set up here instead of closing down.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (11:23): I appreciate the discussion so far; it has been very interesting. I want to thank those opposite for this opportunity to inject some facts and reality into the Victorian coalition's discourse on gas. Those opposite surely are aware and have even been given advice, like the rest of our nation, that the way we produce energy around the world is dramatically changing. In Australia and indeed here in Victoria we simply need to face head on that our historical methods of energising our businesses and homes are no longer fit for purpose. What once were cheap and plentiful sources of fossil gas are now declining.

Gas is increasingly expensive. Victorian residential customers are now paying \$500 more for gas than they did less than two years ago. That is an increase of 35 per cent. Yet those opposite propose to do nothing about energy prices for Victorian families. Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio said:

We're ensuring Victorians aren't locked into expensive fossil gas prices and sky-high energy bills for decades – helping them switch to efficient electric appliances that will deliver significant bill savings.

This is a proactive and pragmatic response from a government that is developing a strategy based on the facts, and new gas production in Victoria will not happen at sufficient scale or speed to change the overall trajectory of the sector. I am sure others will say this in this debate on this side, but this debate really is about geology not ideology. I ask Mr Davis: why is it that the opposition have no credible plan to reduce energy bills for Victorian households and businesses? Why does the opposition have no credible plan to maintain secure gas supply as we transition? Do not come to me with a problem; come to me with a solution.

Those opposite seem to be running with this narrative that somehow there are restrictions on gas exploration in Victoria. This is not the case. The only activities that are banned are fracking and coal seam gas, and that ban I will point out here was passed in a bipartisan way after a great deal of stakeholder consultation and certainly robust debate.

**A member** interjected.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Yes, they have forgotten that. What I need to know and what my regional community needs to know is: do you intend to overturn the fracking ban? Because if you do, then farming communities and the water industry need to know. I do not want to see agriculture compromised like it has been in New South Wales or our groundwater polluted by gas in the south-west of Victoria. Groundwater towns in the south-west of Victoria include Portland, Port Fairy, Port Campbell and partially the city of Warrnambool. That is a huge economic, social and health risk to the south-west community, so we need you to be up-front about where your plan is, what you are going to do, how you are going to implement it. Tell us your plan. If so, you must be open and transparent with Victorian farmers and the broader community. And if this is not what you intend to do, it would be very helpful if you would indicate how else you intend to deal with the gas shortages and rising costs for gas as a result.

Of course the question brings to mind nuclear. We have the longest lead time, the science is not even in. It is completely banned federally and by the state. It is the most expensive solution. There is incredible toxic waste that is completely unresolved in the nuclear debate, and of course high risk to –

**A member** interjected.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** I think there is a massive difference between producing nuclear medicine and nuclear energy – a massive difference. And there is a high risk to communities who live nearby to nuclear power plants. You only need to look as far as Europe and Japan for that.

As the facts stand today, conventional onshore gas exploration is permitted and is occurring. The moratorium on conventional onshore gas exploration, which was introduced by the former Liberal government, with our support, was lifted in 2021. There is nothing stopping a proponent from seeking an exploration permit in Victoria. The program investigated a suite of scientific research to better understand the potential for new offshore and conventional gas discoveries and the risk, benefits and impacts of allowing exploration and production. This program has assessed the feasibility of additional onshore underground gas storage in the area of Port Campbell, which is in my electorate. The program included an extensive, proactive and phased community and stakeholder engagement program with Warrnambool city, Corangamite shire and others in the region. The result of this research was that the lead scientist found:

There are currently no proven and probable (ready for imminent development) onshore conventional gas reserves in Victoria.

This is a fact. I will remind those opposite that the *Gas Substitution Roadmap Update* published in December last year is very clear. Transitioning Victoria off fossil fuels cannot possibly happen overnight and our efforts will take years. We know it will be more difficult to cut for some users more than others, but the fact is we must start now. We must do this in a methodical way, assessing each segment of gas users individually and doing what works best.

As the future moves to a world using renewable energy to combat climate change, we are transitioning to homes that are all electric. In fact electric homes are now cheaper to run than dual-fuel homes – of course. Significant numbers of our businesses will also find electrification makes economic sense. However, there are some gas users who need to continue using gas for the foreseeable future, including industries using fossil gas as feedstock or for high heat applications. Even in those cases the gas substitution agenda will help them. By assisting those who can switch away from fossil gas, we free up supply for those who need to keep using it, which is why getting Victorian households off gas is a sensible priority.

Households are responsible for half of Victoria's gas use every year, and the evidence is clear that the best way to reduce household energy bills is to go all electric. Of course we recognise that going all electric in one hit is not feasible for everyone. That is why through the Victorian energy upgrades and Solar Homes programs the Allan Labor government delivers thousands in up-front discounts and incentives for specific appliances, such as efficient electric reverse-cycle air conditioners or hot-water heat pumps, so that Victorians can get their electrification journey started step by step. This is all part of a bigger picture plan being meticulously overseen by our minister for energy, Minister Lily D'Ambrosio, and a big part of the jigsaw puzzle coming together to transform our energy, including the SEC and how it will be an important tool to bring together our objectives. Publicly owned businesses will also play a role in helping homes make the switch to electric appliances, and the SEC will be piloting their new services in coming months. I fully do not support this motion.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:33): I rise to support Mr Davis's motion. It is evident that the Labor Party is split down the middle when it comes to energy policy and when it comes to gas. The federal minister for energy acknowledges that gas must be in the mix and must be there on the way in the transition to renewables. However, the state Minister for Energy and Resources and the state Labor Party in general are saying the opposite and eventually want to ban it altogether. One party – two completely different views, and it is causing chaos in Victoria.

The feds seem to have some common sense, I must say, when it comes to gas, yet the state team are completely blindfolded by ideology and so blindfolded that they cannot see and weigh up the facts. They quote that renewables are going to bring energy prices down and they quote that they are the cheapest form of energy; however, the facts say something different. The countries with the highest share of renewables in their electricity supply have the highest prices in the world, and those nations with the lowest share have the lowest prices in the world. Some examples of that – the lowest energy costs in the world are in places like Russia, Saudi Arabia and Korea, and the highest prices are in areas like Spain, the Netherlands and Germany. Those with the highest renewable rates have the highest costs.

I am for the environment, I am for cleaner energy and I am for cheap energy, but I also am somebody that is for honest narratives. Do not tell people you are going to make their bills cheaper in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis and then go and do the complete opposite. Observations here in Australia and overseas show that replacing controllable energy supplies with necessarily intermittent wind and solar have catastrophic effects on cost. I find it bizarre that in Victoria we are always saying we are in the midst of an energy crisis when in Victoria most of the time we are literally standing on top of resources that are able to power the world. I want to say that I am not anti-renewables, but I am pro cheap and pro reliable energy.

Victoria has not always been in the situation where we are now. In fact Victoria used to be the land of opportunity. It used to be a place where you could come and you could have a business that would thrive. You could provide for a family on one income, and businesses could do well. A lot of this was because of our reliable, cheap energy, but the fact is we have moved so far away from that. Victoria has not always been the most highly taxed state in the country. It has not always been the most in-debt state in the country. We have not always had more debt than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined. Once upon a time this was a place people could come to prosper and get ahead.

One of the reasons we were able to do that was because of our cheap, reliable energy. Cheap, reliable energy allows businesses to thrive and families to move forward and even prosper on one wage.

But my, how things have changed, and this seems to be because there is a lot of conflict in the Labor ranks. State Labor is at odds with their federal colleagues, who know that gas must be in the mix. Gas plays a vital role in the transition to cleaner energy. It is much cleaner than coal, it would cut emissions by roughly half and we have the resources to do it. Labor continually talks about the gas shortage, but the reason there is a shortage is because they have not undertaken any gas exploration in the last decade. Gas is available, and industry experts are telling us that it is – they are backing that up. Where there are frailties in a renewables-dominant energy system, that needs to be compensated by some dispatchable power in the form of gas. It is well known that we are rich in resources and we can provide cheap, reliable energy. The only thing that is stopping us from doing that is ideology from the other side.

In the interests of time, and to give Dr Mansfield a decent run on this, I just want to say that this motion is a practical one. It is asking the house to look at the *Future Gas Strategy*. It is a move in the right direction. It is a move looking at facts rather than fiction, looking at what actually is practical rather than just focusing on a positive narrative that may not be the truth in reality. Labor always talks about cheap energy, yet under Labor the bills continue to rise. I am for clean energy, but I am about being honest and pragmatic about it. We need gas in the mix, and I commend this bill to the house.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (11:39): Where to start – the fossil fuel lobby and their spin doctors are clearly doing an excellent job. The Greens will, perhaps unsurprisingly, not be supporting this motion. We are a party who has climate action at our core. Gas is a fossil fuel, and fossil fuels are the leading cause of climate change. Every day there is another news story about a devastating climate event somewhere in the world, and many have occurred in our own backyard. Every day there is another story about how records are being broken – year upon year, each year being hotter. Every day we read a story about how climate scientists are distraught that their very worst predictions are coming to bear – they are unfolding. The climate crisis could not be more real, and yet we are still having debates not only about whether there is a role for fossil fuels but about opening up more fossil fuel projects. This is insanity. It is beyond comprehension.

The *Future Gas Strategy* demonstrates that Labor at least federally has also fully succumbed to the gas lobby. They are now willing mouthpieces for the lobby's marketing spin. Their strategy claims gas is essential to reaching net zero – that we may need gas in perpetuity. These are truly unbelievable claims from a party that promised to take action on climate change and to end the climate wars.

Anyone with some basic mathematical skills might be wondering: how can gas be an equation that equals net zero? That must mean there is a significant drawdown of carbon somewhere, because lots of gas emissions need to be offset somehow to get to zero. Well, of course it is the great chimera that is carbon capture and storage. This is how, in Labor's fantasy land, they justify new fossil fuel projects. 'Of course, we'll just pump carbon into the ground or under the sea' – never mind that this technology is essentially unproven and is definitely non-existent on the scale that is required where it exists. It does not even come close to living up to its promises. Two-thirds of the projects that do exist are actually dedicated to extracting more fossil fuels. I mean, this is a giant furphy.

Carbon capture and storage is a joke, and Labor should be embarrassed that they are even entertaining the idea let alone actively promoting it. Australian governments have spent over a billion dollars on developing carbon capture and storage, and what has it resulted in? Nothing. So according to my calculations, gas – that is, lots of emissions – plus zero, because carbon capture and storage will not do anything, equals lots of emissions. It does not equal net zero.

We know that Victorian Labor have made some positive moves on gas. We have heard about their ban on gas in new developments. It is something the Greens called for for a long time, so we welcome that decision by the Victorian Labor government. But we also know that they are approving new gas

projects. There are gas projects going on in Victorian waters off the coast of my electorate, down near the Twelve Apostles, and there are apparently more in the pipeline. They too have succumbed to this furphy that is carbon capture and storage. That is what they base their support of the hydrogen energy supply chain project on – one of the most emissions-intensive projects you could possibly imagine, that gives new life to brown coal, the dirtiest fossil coal that exists.

The gas lobby is also pressuring Victorian Labor. Just in recent days we have heard them calling on them to support more gas exploration. But Victorian Labor has a choice. They too can sell out like their federal colleagues, or they can choose to get out of fossil fuels – like they should. We know that the coalition has long been the party of the fossil fuel industry, and at least they do not pretend to be anything else – they are not even trying. They have been framing this debate around consumer choice, which is the classic Liberal Party play. They are here fighting for choice about a fossil fuel source that has massive negative externalities by accelerating climate change. They are saying consumers should have a right to choose the fuel source. No, they have a right to energy security. That does not mean you have a right to choose what your source of energy is if that source of energy is causing substantial harm to others. We limit consumer choice all the time when there are harms to other people, when it infringes on our rights.

People have a right to a safe climate and a safe future, and I think we should all be prioritising that. Many people across this country voted for Labor at the last federal election hoping beyond hope that they would take action on climate change seriously. What they have shown is that they are no better than the coalition, because both major parties are hooked on fossil fuel donations. That is the truth of the matter. That is what the core of this is. It is true – they are owned by the gas and coal lobbies, and why should we be surprised when we see you out acting like puppets for the industry? What the *Future Gas Strategy* says is that federal Labor have given up on climate action. They have sold out; they have sold our futures and our children's futures to the fossil fuel industry. Their way of ending the climate wars is to wave the white flag to the fossil fuel industry and join the coalition.

In any case, we are not going to be supporting this motion. We are the only ones that appear in this room to be genuinely committed to climate action, to genuinely getting off fossil fuels. We need no more coal and gas. When you commit to no more coal and gas and back that up with action, we will believe you. Until then we will continue to push you. We will push you to end all new fossil fuel projects in Victoria. We will push you to take genuine climate action. We are definitely not going to be supporting the push for anything new on this side. I think I will leave my contribution at that.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:46): I rise to speak on the motion today and add my voice to the chorus that is already speaking on this debate in this chamber, which has been a most interesting debate to listen to. The first thing I would say is that the action that Dr Mansfield is seeking to see is right there, and it is 10 years of investments, 10 years of targets, 10 years of meeting, beating and achieving those targets. We have the most advanced targets in Australia, amongst the highest in the developed world, and what is more we are achieving them. We are achieving them, and in doing so we are seeing this year the Victorian default offer \$100 a year cheaper for Victorian households. That is the result of our continued and sustained investment in renewable energy in this state and the ambition of this government under Premier Allan in particular, and of indeed Minister D'Ambrosio as well. The ambition of this government is not only achieving but smashing renewable energy targets. The action I note that Dr Mansfield wants to see is right there in front of us. The action is happening day by day. We are also doing so in a way that is bringing down power prices for Victorian small businesses and for Victorian households.

Again we have this ridiculous motion from those opposite. Mrs McArthur, I am very disappointed I have not heard you speak on this motion yet, because I feel like I have heard a whole week of talking about gas in our PAEC hearings last week – in fact I think most of your questions on the Suburban Rail Loop portfolio were indeed about gas as well. I know that you are very excited about this, but what this government is excited about is high and achievable renewable energy targets, doing our bit for the planet, and also doing it in a way that provides secure, reliable and cheap energy for all



Victorians. That is what we are doing. The proof of both of those things is there for all to see – the proof is there.

What we have, though, in contrast is those opposite throwing up as much as they can, finding any old bit of rubbish to bring into this place to put forward, because they do not have a plan – just as their federal colleagues do not have a plan and did not have a plan for more than a few months at a time when we last saw them in federal government. How many was it – 16, 17, 18 or 19 times? I do not know. They had so many different energy plans. They would come out one morning and announce a great new energy policy, and by that afternoon it was gone, and usually the minister was gone with it as well. No consistency, and that is again what we see from this side. We see it in the motion they put forward today, and we have seen it in the nuclear debate as well that they are so keen to talk about, it seems. Indeed one of the early contributors from the coalition was mentioning that as well. What is that going to achieve? How are we going to get any nuclear power plant in this country built in a reasonable amount of time – firstly – to achieve any of the things that you claim to care about, which is going to take ages and ages, if not absolute decades, to achieve? Secondly, no answer for any of the nuclear waste or the uranium or any of those other issues – no discussion or even contemplation about that. And thirdly, the cost.

I have mentioned in this chamber before, the United Kingdom right now in Somerset is building the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. The current estimated cost of that project is in the order of A\$65 billion to A\$70 billion, and that is in a country that already has a nuclear network, that already has experience in building and operating nuclear power plants. If it is going to cost the United Kingdom up to \$70 billion to build one single nuclear power plant, how do you expect Australia, with no history of nuclear power plants, with no existing workforces or any other networks or technology infrastructure in place, to be able to do it any cheaper?

**A member** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** You do not care. You do not want to. You are happy for billions and billions – hundreds of billions – of dollars to be spent on building new nuclear power stations. Again I call on those opposite to speak. We hear one thing one day, we hear another the next. We have heard the illustrious Mr Pesutto say he apparently opposes nuclear power in Victoria. I wonder what our friend Mrs McArthur thinks of her party leader saying no nuclear in Victoria – one of the few things he has said something very sensible on. But again we are seeing absolute chaos and division. We are expecting an announcement any week now of Peter Dutton's dreaded list of doom as to which community is going to have a nuclear power plant inflicted upon it. They would not rule it out in Frankston ahead of the Dunkley by-election. Where will they rule it out? Where in the Liberal Party electorates in this place will they actually agree to? I look forward to Ms Crozier's contribution. Perhaps she will tell us exactly where in Victoria she would see a nuclear power plant, perhaps exactly where in the Southern Metro Region too.

We have a strong strategy, a strategy that is working, that is delivering results. We are beating and achieving our climate targets, and we are now doing so in a way that is bringing down power prices for Victorians because we know that the cheapest form of energy is renewable energy. It is also the best way for Victorian households, businesses and the broader economy. This is a ridiculous motion. I condemn it.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:52): I rise in support of Mr Davis's motion. I will reiterate the motion to the house because obviously those across the chamber have not understood what is happening at a federal level and what is happening here at a state level. The motion states:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the federal government's *Future Gas Strategy*, released on 9 May 2024, diverges significantly from the Victorian government's *Gas Substitution Roadmap* –

The federal minister Madeleine King quite rightly said about her state colleague here Ms D'Ambrosio, once she released the road map and looking at transitioning away from gas, that the Commonwealth's new *Future Gas Strategy*, exactly what this motion is referring to, was:

... one "based on facts and data, not ideology or wishful thinking".

Ms King said "gas will remain an important source of energy through to 2050 and beyond" to avoid energy shortfalls and price hikes on the path to net zero.

There seems to be a clear spat between the federal minister and the state minister. We understand that there is a lot of division between the state and federal ministers on this. But the federal minister is talking common sense, and it is language that the community understands.

Today, in a very concerning report around a looming retail recession here in Victoria, Paul Guerra from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry spoke about what business requires, and he said:

All this, while business costs have also gone up ... businesses are extremely concerned about tax and regulation –

we certainly understand that –

labour and skills shortages and energy security and price.

This argument is absolutely being debated within the community around energy security and price. Every consumer in Victoria knows that their energy bills have gone up. I go and speak to my local traders –

**A member** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** You might not – you do not live in your electorate. I go and speak to my people in my electorate. The drycleaner tells me exactly what the electricity prices are. They are struggling. They are working seven days a week to keep that business viable. And this is the disconnect between you, Labor, and what is happening on the ground. This is a huge issue for businesses, as Paul Guerra from VCCI has said, and it is what we are facing here in this state. It is households. It is energy prices that are being passed on through to the consumer at every level. It is something again that Labor do not understand – that when those energy prices get passed on, prices rise. I think we are in agreement that we need to have a sustainable future, but gas has to be, as Madeleine King says, part of that mix. Mr Davis's –

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** You are not a fan of Ms King, Mr McIntosh?

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Mr McIntosh!

**Georgie CROZIER:** You are very verbal about your disgust with Ms King's federal policy strategy that we are debating today, and it is unfortunate that the Victorian public are confused about your position and then federal Labor's position. They understand that federal Labor's position is not based on ideology, and that is what Ms King says about the Allan Labor government and Ms D'Ambrosio's strategy. It is all over the place, and they are having a public spat.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Mr McIntosh, I know you are extremely exercised about this failed policy from your own minister that is at odds with the federal minister Ms King. I will repeat it for you, Mr McIntosh, so you hear.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr McIntosh, please!

**Georgie CROZIER:** I say again, this is the federal minister as quoted:

... the Commonwealth's new Future Gas Strategy as one "based on facts and data, not ideology or wishful thinking".

... "gas will remain an important source of energy through to 2050 and beyond" to avoid energy shortfalls and price hikes on the path to net zero.

They have a clear plan, Victorian Labor do not, and that is the issue. What we say is that we agree that there needs to be sensible transition and gas must be a part of that plan. We know that you do not agree with that. We know you do not support choice, and consumers understand you do not support choice and they are actually speaking out.

In conclusion to this important debate – because it is about energy security, it is about energy affordability – I commend Mr Davis for bringing this important motion to the house today that needs to be supported if there is a future for Victorian businesses and households in ensuring we have a proper, reliable energy source.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (14):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (17):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Members*

**Attorney-General**

**Minister for Skills and TAFE**

*Absence*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:04): I rise to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today I will respond to questions for the portfolios of Attorney-General and emergency services and seek responses for any representing portfolios. The Minister for Housing will respond to questions for the portfolios of regional development and skills and TAFE and will seek responses for any representing portfolios.

***Questions without notice and ministers statements***

**Alcohol and other drug services**

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:05): (541) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. In April the *Herald Sun* reported that demand for alcohol rehab services has soared by more than 50 per cent since before the pandemic, forcing thousands of Victorians to wait months for treatment. As a former police officer, I know all too well the detrimental impact the lack of alcohol and other drug and gambling services can have on our community, families, employers and the health and emergency services staff who are often left to pick up the pieces when Victorians have no choice but to hit rock bottom before they are able to access support. It occurs to me that having treatment options that are inclusive of early intervention and prevention models that enable Victorians to access treatment, care and support for risky addiction in such a way where they are able to retain their employment and that encourage early intervention would allow Victorians to seek support with addiction earlier, before it spirals out of control, taking much-needed pressure off our overburdened

health and emergency services workers. My question is: what has been done so far to deliver those services?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:05): That is a really great question. Obviously in terms of the government’s response to harm reduction, including rehabilitation services, this is an area where we have been proud to continue to invest. Our budget for this year alone is \$376 million in terms of alcohol and other drug supports, and you would be aware that we recently announced an additional \$95 million for our statewide action plan when it comes to harmful drug addiction.

In terms of the additional rehabilitation services that we have provided, we have been able to significantly increase the number of rehab beds that are available for both alcohol and drug addiction. We now have statewide 502 rehab beds and 150 withdrawal beds, and that includes a number of important services across regional Victoria. In Bendigo we have added an additional 31 beds, plus four in Shepparton, 74 in Gippsland, 24 in Ballarat, 31 in Wangaratta and 52 in Geelong, and there are an additional 30 to come as part of a project we are in the process of delivering in Mildura. We understand that Victorians need access to rehabilitation services close to where they live.

In terms of your question about emergency services workers, we obviously understand that often because of the type of work that these workers are performing they do come under significant pressure. It is challenging work, and we want to make sure that they are supported. There are a number of election commitments that were made at the 2022 election about supports for emergency services and health workers, which I am happy to provide a little bit more information to the member about. But in addition to that, we have also committed to delivering a worker-focused rehabilitation drug and alcohol service, the Crossing. I am looking forward to continuing work through my department to deliver that important project to workers across Victoria.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:08): I thank the minister. Minister, on the 2022 election promise, in 2022 the then Andrews Labor government announced that they would fund a service in partnership with employers, trade unions and public sector drug and alcohol services to provide an answer for working people and their families who find themselves addicted to drugs, alcohol or gambling. This announcement garnered major support at the time amongst AOD providers, trade unions and employers alike. It is now 2024 and there has been no action taken. It is my understanding that in frustration an urgency motion was even brought to the floor of the Labor Party conference urging the government to get on with it, with unanimous support and even a standing ovation. When is the minister going to make these urgent services available to those in need?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:09): Thank you for that supplementary question, and I perhaps cheekily will note that there was an urgency resolution about just about everything at this year’s ALP conference, and that is a wonderful thing. They are the democratic processes of our party, and we cherish them.

We made a \$12 million commitment in last year’s budget for delivery of this important initiative. I will be continuing to work closely with my department about getting that project moving. I have met with a number of trade union leaders about this important issue, and the government is committed to working closely with those representatives of working people and delivering this important service.

#### Child protection

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): (542) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, it was revealed during the PAEC children hearing that there have been 215 reports of sexual abuse of children in residential care this year to date. Minister, what numbers must be reached before you do more to stop the scourge of vulnerable children being abused in residential care?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:10): I thank the member for her question – yet again. We have traversed this ground quite extensively in previous question times, and we traversed this ground quite extensively in PAEC last week as well. But I am happy to go there again for the benefit of the house. As I have said before, children who are in the child protection system – 17,000 on average on any given day, coming in and out of the care system – are some of the most vulnerable children in Victoria. Of those who are residing in residential care, they are certainly amongst those who have experienced the greatest levels of trauma and who are at a heightened risk of exploitation of all kinds. But it is important to note that the children in residential care are also not in a custodial setting – they are children in care. Children in care are afforded the same opportunities –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: If the member would like to listen to the answer, I am happy to assist. Children who are in care should be afforded the same opportunities to participate in social and community life as any other child, and that includes them being out and about in the community. What those on the other side of the house seem to be unable to do, though, is read a budget and read data. It is increasingly frustrating that our conversations around how we protect children in care are diminished by these questions. We know that we need to do more to help children and young people who are in out-of-home care, and that is why in the previous budget we invested more than half a billion dollars in therapeutic care. That investment in therapeutic care includes wrapping around every child in residential care therapeutic services. Importantly, it also includes the work that we are doing to disrupt paedophiles and predators who prey on children who are most vulnerable – who are out there in the community doing things that children do, from meeting their friends to other things. If predators and paedophiles are going to prey on those people in the community, then they must be disrupted. I would expect that that would be a bipartisan issue, not one that is diminished by the politics of this house and these types of questions, time and time and time again.

What this government is doing is investing record amounts of funding in ensuring that the children who are in our residential care settings have therapeutic supports wrapped around them. The investment that we are specifically making in trying to disrupt predators and paedophiles who prey on these vulnerable children has, as a result of last year's budget, led to 13 sexual exploitation leads across the state. Every area of the state is covered, during hours and after hours, with the intention of disrupting these predators and paedophiles who prey on very vulnerable children. I would expect that that would be something that everybody in this place supports.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:13): Minister, I listened to your answer then, and it was very defensive. You have a responsibility as the minister in relation to these vulnerable children, so the questions will keep coming. I ask as my supplementary: regardless of residential care not being a custodial setting, there is an obligation under law for the state to act as a good parent. When will the government meet this obligation?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:13): As I said, it is disappointing that these issues get diminished by petty politics by those opposite. I am –

**Georgie Crozier**: On a point of order, President, the minister constantly used that phrase in her answer to the substantive question. She is debating the answer. These questions are important. I would ask the minister to come back and answer the very basic questions around what the government is doing to protect these vulnerable children.

**The PRESIDENT**: The minister had only just started her answer.

**Harriet Shing**: On the point of order, President, it would seem that Ms Crozier's preamble to the supplementary required, quite reasonably, a response to be given. Should there be a reasonably

straightforward question, it should be asked without that editorial, which Minister Blandthorn was responding to.

**The PRESIDENT:** Minister Shing is correct that the preamble forms part of the question. There were 7 seconds on the clock of 1 minute to respond, so I will call the minister to answer.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Thank you, President. I make no apologies for being defensive, because the children in our care system need people who are defending them day in, day out. That is exactly what our department is doing, working in collaboration with Victoria Police, and I am absolutely certain that the police take their role in disrupting paedophiles and predators very seriously.

But what I outlined in my substantive answer and will outline again is that we invested more than half a billion dollars in last year's budget, which has led to the implementation of 13 sexual exploitation practice leads across all divisions. I met with one of them just last week in the south division, and I will be pleased to update you on that visit when I get to my ministers statement. But in the previous budget we invested more than half a billion dollars ensuring that we are wrapping supports, including supports to disrupt sexual exploitation of these vulnerable children, through the work of the department and in collaboration with the work of Victoria Police.

#### **Ministers statements: multicultural communities**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:16): On Thursday I had the great pleasure of attending Thornbury High School with the member for Northcote Kat Theophanous to meet students taking part in the fantastic homework clubs program. The homework clubs are one of the key initiatives funded as part of the *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*. In this year's budget we have invested over \$17 million in the action plan, including for homework clubs, which focus on keeping young Victorians of African heritage engaged in school and connected with their community.

At Thornbury High School the homework club is run by Endeavour Youth Australia, and I want to give a special thanks to their CEO and member of the Victorian African Communities Committee Mohamed Semra for his tireless advocacy and support for young people in Victoria's African communities. I was also joined by committee member Mahamed Ahmed and the chair of the committee and member for Cranbourne Pauline Richards. Over the past three years more than 1300 students have enrolled in and benefited from the homework clubs program, with feedback showing students are more confident and have a positive outlook on school and their education. The great turnout and the enthusiasm from students last week were a demonstration of how well received this program is. Students told me that the homework club motivates them to complete all their homework and do much better at school.

Supporting this important cohort of young people to thrive and build their confidence in their education pursuits extends well beyond the classroom. It means ensuring each and every young person of African heritage has a strong sense of belonging, connection and inclusion in their school and wider community. I am so proud to see the continuing success of this program and to hear the different stories from these bright young individuals at Thornbury High.

#### **Floods**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:18): (543) My question is for the Minister for Water. Over the past 20 years residents of Kensington Banks bought their homes based on advice from Melbourne Water that they were above the flood level. But recently revised modelling has deemed them a high risk for flooding. Current estimates are that this has reduced the value of these homes by up to 15 per cent, not to mention that people are worried about their homes flooding and insurance premiums increasing. The recent independent Pagone report indicates that the construction of the flood wall around the Flemington Racecourse raised flood levels. It also found that 240 residential lots were affected by the 2022 flood that would not have been impacted had the wall never been built. In your

role as water minister, will you support the affected community by advocating that the Flemington Racecourse flood wall be taken down?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:19): Thank you, Dr Mansfield, for that question. The floods that occurred in 2022 caused so much devastation across a number of local government areas in Melbourne and indeed around the state. They were exceptionally challenging for so many people in so many different ways, from the way in which information was provided in the immediate aftermath of the floods to the early warning systems, the work that was undertaken in often swiftwater rescue situations and the relief and recovery efforts that took place, again, not just in the middle of Melbourne but all over the state. What we have seen in the Pagone review is a careful analysis of the factors involved in that flooding event and the way in which homes were inundated and affected.

Melbourne Water has done modelling to better understand the nature of risk, and there are three stages, as I outlined at PAEC last week, that are relevant to the way in which the response is developed and implemented. In the first instance, the modelling indicates a risk of effect, whether that is some form of inundation in and around the edges of a property right through to underfloor flooding or indeed overfloor inundation. Melbourne Water is in the process of talking very carefully with residents about the impact of that modelling and how it is that a one-in-100-year event, as distinct from what occurred in the flooding event, may affect them. This includes thousands of conversations, discussions, letterboxing, calls, emails and responses to customer requests, alongside a community webinar that occurred just last week and further conversations to occur to make sure that people know the extent to which the flood model –

**Sarah Mansfield:** On a point of order, President, I would just draw the minister back to the question, which was about the flood wall. She has not mentioned the flood wall at all yet.

**The PRESIDENT:** I call the minister back to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** Thank you very much. Dr Mansfield, your entire question is premised on the impact of the floods, and what I am talking to is the impact of the floods. What Melbourne Water will be doing in its discussions with residents is making sure that people can make the right decisions for them. That is an important thing for me to put on the record, as I did last week at PAEC. As far as the flood wall itself, the impact of infrastructure goes – whether it is a bridge, a railway tunnel, large-scale population growth or other infrastructure – it needs to be understood against the backdrop of changing risk, whether that is drought, flood, fire or storm. As Minister for Water my responsibility relates to making sure that Melbourne Water as a statutory authority is acquitting its obligations around modelling and is making sure that residents have the information that is based around the most current standards and information – *(Time expired)*

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:22): I did not really get a clear answer about the flood wall, but I will take you up where you left off around the advice that Melbourne Water provides. There are over 900 families and households who bought their homes explicitly on the advice of Melbourne Water, one of your agencies, that they were above the flood zone, and now that advice has changed pretty much overnight. Will the government take any action to support these affected households, such as additional mitigation or compensation to support them during this difficult time?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:23): Dr Mansfield, to assume that we live in a static climate and environment ignores the realities of the impact of a variety of different factors. When Melbourne Water updated its modelling, it used large volumes of topographic data. It collected flood data from the floods in 1974, 1983 and 2022, and it tested the model against five historic events to better understand the way in which inundation would occur. Importantly, when we look at climate volatility and we look at the impact of large volumes of water inundating areas in and around waterways, which is a natural consequence of water going to where it naturally goes, we see that the impact is changing over time.

When we combine that with the impact of population growth and increases to density, we can see that the variables are changing. For us not to have contemporary information for people to rely upon would be ignoring the obligations that we have to our community, and that is why this data – *(Time expired)*

### Housing

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:24): (544) My question is for the Minister for Housing. Productivity Commission data released yesterday shows that the Labor government's much-vaunted commitment to social housing is an absolute sham, with the government assisting only 2835 new Victorian households with social housing compared to 2880 in Western Australia. Minister, why has your government only assisted around the same number of new households with social housing as WA despite Victoria having more than double the population?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:24): Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for that question. The Productivity Commission's data is actually not based on contemporary information. What we have done since that data was released – and I will take you to March 2024 – is reduce the vacancy rate across our housing stock in the public space down to 1.8 per cent. That is less than the private market and private rental vacancy rates in regional Victoria and indeed in metropolitan Melbourne. In the last year we have placed 7000 households into social housing. We are making a record investment that sees more than 9400 homes in planning, construction or completion. We have more than 3500 homes, in gross terms, that have been brought into the system in the last 12 months. We have acquitted around 50 per cent of the Big Housing Build, and we have got an additional \$1 billion as part of the regional package, which will deploy at least 1300 new social and affordable homes across the state.

When we look to the work that is being undertaken across the board, we can see that Victoria's investment is making a significant difference in addressing the housing register numbers, that we are starting to see a downturn in the waitlist and that we are seeing record investment for vulnerable cohorts within the housing space. We know that a record investment of \$300 million into maintenance is playing an important role in this work, alongside \$18 million for a new maintenance system. We also know that the record investment in housing and homelessness services, including \$196 million in this year's budget, alongside additional support for specific cohorts such as victim-survivors of family violence, is part of a whole-of-system response to provide assistance to those at greatest risk of homelessness or rough sleeping or indeed those people who are accessing social housing under some often extremely difficult circumstances. We also know that it is programs like private rental assistance, which has assisted around 2766 people in the last year, that are making a difference, where we have around 30 per cent of the people accessing homelessness services for the first time coming from the private rental space.

Victoria has invested more than any other jurisdiction, and I am looking forward to seeing those vacancy rates, the turnaround times and the placement times continue to build on the work that we have done. I also note that we have brought down the maintenance backlog by about 80 per cent since 2022. It is now sitting at around 7767, as compared with around 90,000. This is not happening by accident; it is happening because we are allocating resources, we are investing in upgrades, maintenance and repairs and we are making sure that new stock is brought on line. If you are saying, Mr Mulholland, that we should not be replacing old stock with new stock, then I would invite you to see some of the conditions that people deserve better than and from and our investment that is changing this – *(Time expired)*

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:28): Minister, support for vulnerable Victorians has flatlined in your government's budget, with Victoria's target for social housing properties lower in 2024–25, as compared to 2023–24. Has the government completely abandoned its big build social housing commitments?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:28): Mr Mulholland, again, if you had only started with a question, it would have been



a very short answer, but your preamble does require that I go into some of the detail. A lot of people are doing it tough in the economic climate that we are in at the moment. An increase to rental inflation, alongside successive interest rate increases, has made it very, very difficult for many people in Victoria, around Australia and indeed around the world. The total new applications list, with no transfers, actually reduced by 16 per cent from March 2023 to March 2024. The priority list, with no transfers, reduced by 15 per cent from March 2023 to March 2024, and we are seeing a significant downward shift in the one-bedroom subwaitlist, which is about half of the Victorian Housing Register.

When you ask about what the Big Housing Build is delivering, I can give you these numbers, but ultimately, Mr Mulholland, this is about people who are able to move into social housing, who are having their needs better met – not perfectly met, but better met – because of our investment, and that work goes on.

### Ministers statements: child protection

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:29): I rise to update the house on the importance of child protection practitioners in ensuring the safety of children and families right across our state. Last week I had the privilege to attend the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's Dandenong office to meet the dedicated staff who work tirelessly to keep children safe and families strong. I had the opportunity to meet the dedicated workforce across the division, including workers in case management, in investigation, in professional practice and in sexual exploitation practice work, just to name a few.

What struck me was the dedication of these hardworking individuals. They are first responders to families in crisis. Day in, day out they turn up for children and families in what are often difficult and complex and sometimes extremely volatile circumstances. We are continuing to support these incredibly vital staff in the critical work that they do. In the 2024–25 state budget we are providing \$8 million to continue to deliver the career advancement program, the child protection employment program and the Go Where You're Needed campaign. These programs provide critical workforce supports for recruiting and retaining frontline child protection practitioners by promoting their profession, supporting career advancement or providing a continuum of new entrants into the program.

It was also heartening to hear about how the investment we made in the last budget to target and disrupt child sexual exploitation was making a real difference on the ground. I was able to hear directly from workers about how having a sexual exploitation practice lead in each area across the state is providing coordinated work to disrupt these criminal actions. In relation to child protection practitioner allocations – a common question in this place – it was reassuring to hear on the ground directly from the workforce on the factors that they weigh up in allocating cases. It was clear from my discussions that there is active oversight of all children and young people in the care system. On any given day that can be around 17,000 children.

Throughout my visit one common discussion with the staff was how we elevate their profession in the eyes of the public. That is a duty on all of us, including in this place, to ensure that child protection workers are recognised and valued for their hardworking commitment in very difficult circumstances. We do have a choice in how we discuss child protection and family services, and on this side of the house we will always back the workforce.

### Treaty

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:31): (545) My question is for the Minister for Government Services in the other place. In the *Victoria Government Gazette* dated 21 March 2024 the minister declared that four separate types of records of the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission will not be available for public inspection for a period of 30 years, until 2054. The formulation of a planned treaty in Victoria has the potential to be very divisive within the community, particularly if Victorians see that important information is purposely being hidden by the government.

Can the minister explain why this important information is deliberately being withheld from the Victorian public until 2054?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:32): I thank Mrs Tyrrell for her question. I will seek a response to your question. It may in fact be a matter for the minister for treaty, but we will pass the question on for a response accordingly.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:32): Thank you, Minister. Will the minister immediately revoke this declaration in the interests of full transparency for the Victorian people?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:33): I will refer the question accordingly.

### Sobering facilities

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): (546) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, why hasn't the government released the final evaluation report that was due in August 2023 into the sobering-up centre trial based in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:33): Thank you very much for that question. It does give me the opportunity to correct the record, because there has been quite a lot of mischief and misinformation out there being driven largely by those opposite – very unusual! It is really important for the house to remember why these reforms were so important to implement. They were in response to a number of coroners reports. And of course First Nations Victorian people have been campaigning for decades, since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, to have a situation where public drunkenness was decriminalised, and that is exactly what our government has done. We conducted a number of trials of sobering centres, as those opposite are very well aware. The results of those trials were taken into account as we rolled out our public health response to public drunkenness. No longer will people end up in a police cell just for being intoxicated.

I did have the absolute pleasure of visiting Ngwala on Friday. I have also visited a number of the other services that are delivering important outreach and places of safety and in the case of Collingwood and St Kilda sobering centres for those Victorians who are unable to be reconnected with their family and with their loved ones. What those workers told me were incredibly powerful stories about the differences that their services are making, and in many cases that is about connecting them with other services to help them get their lives back on track. So you can appreciate my shock when I was leaving Ngwala on Friday to see Ms Crozier's car pull up at the service and her start filming a community health service, an Aboriginal controlled community health service –

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, the minister is attacking me. I was actually going down to meet a resident opposite the centre, Ms Stitt, so would you like to apologise to the resident who has been in contact with your office about what is going on in her street?

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, Ms Crozier. That is a point of debate.

**Ingrid STITT:** The point I want to make about this is here is a person who is putting herself forward as the alternative health minister of our state, filming a community health service.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order. If I do not crystal-ball your point of order, Mr Davis, I will call you, but question time is not a time to attack the opposition or, as per a previous ruling, to 'hop into the opposition'.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a further point of order, President, the minister is factually incorrect.

**Harriet Shing:** So move a motion.

**Georgie Crozier:** I will move a motion that question time is not a time, as Mr Davis said, to attack us – it is to answer the questions.

**The PRESIDENT:** I have already upheld that point of order – before he put it, because I crystal-balled it. I will call the minister back to the question.

**Ingrid STITT:** Thank you, President. I know that Ms Crozier is very sensitive about these issues.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister is defying your ruling. This is not a time to attack the opposition, and she is back into it.

**Georgie Crozier:** On the point of order, President, the minister is misleading the house. I am not sensitive. I have said I went down to see a resident. I am happy to tell the minister –

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie Crozier:** I am happy for the minister to speak to the resident about her concerns.

**The PRESIDENT:** Ms Crozier, you are debating the point of order. There is provision at the end of the minister's answer to –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** If we can bring some order to the house, I will call the minister.

**Ingrid STITT:** Thank you, President. I will make every effort to be orderly, as I most often am. I do think, though, that this highlights the priorities here.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** We are getting a bit loose. The minister responded in a few seconds, and I did glean where she was going anyway. Can people wait until I call them to do their point of order as well.

**Ingrid STITT:** Thank you, President. These are incredibly important reforms. I cannot think of a public policy area more deserving of bipartisan support than the health-led response to public intoxication. I will remain focused on supporting those incredible public and community health services that are providing support so far already to over 6000 Victorians – *(Time expired)*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:39): The minister did not at all address the question. As I was saying, the resident I was visiting last week, down opposite the St Kilda site, was concerned about the trial and what is going on, so I will ask again: when will you release the report?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:39): I actually did address Ms Crozier's substantive question in relation to these matters. I explained – I know that they are having trouble grasping this concept – that following the trial, which was conducted in a number of locations, and the report that was conducted as a result of the trial, the responses from the trial were incorporated into the model of care that has been provided across the state. Ms Crozier can continue to conduct herself in this way and pursue grubby politics, but I will remain focused on making sure that these Victorians get the support they need in the community and right across this state.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): I move:

That the minister's answer be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ministers statements: Greyhound Adoption Program**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:41): I rise today to speak about the Greyhound Adoption Program at Tarrengower Prison. I have had the pleasure of updating the house on this program previously. It is one that I know holds significant interest to many members of this house. The Greyhound Adoption Program gives prisoners the opportunity to care for and ready former racing greyhounds for adoption. Earlier this month we proudly marked an important milestone in our program: the rehoming of the 600th greyhound, named Sparrow. Sparrow’s graduation marked a significant milestone for the program, and it is a testament to all the staff and participants who have worked so hard to get it there.

In my corrections portfolio we understand the positive effects of rehabilitation not just on the lives of people in custody or their families and communities but also on community safety more broadly. We also know the rehabilitative benefits caring for and training dogs can have for people in custody. This fantastic program not only gives retired racing greyhounds a new life but has helped more than 100 participants gain valuable skills and build their confidence. Prisoners involved in the program train former racing dogs across a six-week period and prepare them for adoption, supported by Greyhound Racing Victoria. The prisoners take responsibility for exercising, socialising and helping the dogs learn basic obedience skills. Along the way the participants themselves learn valuable skills, helping their rehabilitation and reducing their risk of reoffending upon release.

Thank you to all the corrections staff and program participants that have helped rehome 600 dogs and counting. I am sure many are curled up on the couch or making memories with families right across the state. I am also excited for the future of this progressive and pawsitive program – sorry, that was terrible.

**Mental health services**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:42): (547) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. The Treasurer announced that 35 of the promised mental health and wellbeing local hubs will be delayed. This is due to the government’s repeated failure to invest in workforce development, including in this year’s budget. Workforce shortages are no surprise to the mental health sector; they have been calling for action for years. However, the sector was fully expecting and preparing for the next tranche of those hubs. The CEO of Mental Health Victoria stated that the locals are ‘an attractive service model for new staff and those returning to the sector’, adding that the hubs are a key element of integrated mental health care. So I ask the minister: with no meaningful investment in mental health workforce capacity building in the budget, how will the government address the workforce shortage they say is the reason for not delivering on its commitment to opening these 35 hubs?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:43): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question, and these are important issues. I do take a bit of issue with the way in which that question has been framed. I do not agree at all and I do not think the budget papers support the contention that there is not significant support for the workforce. Of course our mental health workforce are the absolute backbone of the system, whether we are talking about community mental health services or whether we are talking about the acute end of the sector. They will continue to have my support, and they will continue to receive strong investment from the government to make sure that we continue to build a strong pipeline of mental health workers for our state. In fact we have already delivered over \$600 million in funding. That has enabled us to commission 2500 positions across the system, and to date, between 2021 and 2023, we had delivered 1700 full-time equivalents already, so FTEs, and we will continue in 2024 and 2025 to deliver the balance of those 2500.

On top of that we have also got a number of important incentives for those in graduate positions, and graduate programs are incredibly important in terms of getting that on-the-ground experience across the sector. In recognition of the fact that there has been, like in many sectors, a challenging

environment in terms of skills shortages, we have invested in this year's budget \$15.8 million to provide a pipeline of workers so we can continue rolling out our locals. We already have rolled out 15. Those services are both in metropolitan and regional Victoria. In recognition of the fact that it is going to take us a little longer to roll out the remaining locals, we have provided funding in this year's budget to continue operating our mental health and wellbeing hubs, which will mean that we have a great network across the state of services in terms of that community missing middle.

We are very committed to continuing this important work. We have said on a number of occasions, and I am happy to repeat it for the house's benefit, that every single one of the royal commission's recommendations will be delivered on. But we have to be realistic about the pace and the sequence in which we do that. These investments are very important in terms of the incredibly important role the workforce plays in achieving all of the vision that the royal commission final report set out for us.

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:46): I thank the minister for her response. I guess if it is not staff shortages it must be just a good old-fashioned budget cut. The establishment of a lived and living experience agency was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, so I thank the minister for raising that issue. The royal commission was clear that the voices of people with lived and living experience must be central to building a person-focused, rights-based mental health and wellbeing system. Many in the mental health sector have expressed deep disappointment that the government has failed to allocate funding in this year's budget to fulfill this important recommendation and question the government's commitment to fund all of the recommendations of the royal commission. I ask the minister: what is the government's timeline for funding this important agency?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:47): Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for your supplementary. I have only got a minute to answer this, so perhaps what I can reassure you of is that I meet with the representatives of a number of important peaks that represent lived experience – both workers and consumers – and also representatives of carers across the system. I meet with them regularly. I think it is a fair description that they are disappointed that the lived experience agency was not provided funding in this year's budget, but I have been able to reassure those advocacy groups and the leaders in the lived experience community that we are absolutely committed to delivering on this recommendation and will work closely with them on delivering on that aspiration and that recommendation of the royal commission.

### **Eating disorders**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:48): (548) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Suicide rates of neurodiverse patients with eating disorders is on the rise in Victoria. Are you confident the family-based therapies model adopted within Victoria's health system is the best model to treat these patients, particularly those on the autism spectrum?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:49): Thank you for your question, Ms Bath. It is an important area, particularly given that we know that there has been a significant rise in presentations of those living with eating disorders right across our health system. I am very proud that our budget did make a significant investment in the area of addressing eating disorders to the tune of \$31 million in this year's budget.

What we have tried to do, Ms Bath, is work closely with Eating Disorders Victoria and others within the health system who specialise in this kind of treatment to look at different models of care so that we are trying to avoid people getting into that cycle of being hospitalised regularly. So we have provided funding for a number of alternative in-the-home treatments as part of this budget allocation. There is \$6.9 million for an eating disorders day program across regional Victoria, which I am sure you would be pleased to hear about. That would include, as I said, outpatient services so that people are not needing to be treated as inpatients. We have also provided \$6.4 million to deliver 10 dedicated

early intervention professionals in the communities that need them the most – and it will be our area mental health and wellbeing services that those positions are embedded in – and \$6.5 million to fund two in-home intensive early engagement and treatment programs. One will be delivered through Alfred Health, and the second will be via an infant, child and youth mental health and wellbeing service. Also, there is \$5.8 million to support the invaluable work in advocacy and research of Eating Disorders Victoria, who do a lot of really great work supporting families and –

**Melina Bath:** On a point of order, President, I particularly asked the minister to respond to the family-based therapies model and that some of these families are feeling that this is very restrictive in its practices. The minister has been relevant to the topic but not relevant to this issue: family-based therapies in the Victorian health system.

**The PRESIDENT:** I believe the minister was relevant to the question.

**Ingrid STITT:** I do believe that all of the budget investments that I was just outlining go directly to making sure that families have that care where they need it. It has been important to have an eye to making sure that the services are available in regional Victoria as well as metropolitan Victoria. This work obviously builds on investments from previous budgets, but it is absolutely the case that we know that we have to really do much more to come up with treatments that are going to best support the health needs of people struggling with eating disorders.

**Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:52):** Minister, I thank you for your response. Given the increasing number of parents expressing concern over this particular treatment model – the family-based therapy model – in our hospital systems for their children and that suicide rates of neurodiverse patients with eating disorders are on the rise in Victoria, what actions are you going to undertake to address this alarming rise? What is the ‘much more’ that you should be doing right now?

**Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:53):** Thank you, Ms Bath. I appreciate that this is a very complex area, but in answering your substantive question I was genuinely trying to give you a good overview of the types of treatment services that we have funded in this year’s budget. They are all about trying to ensure that it is not in a hospital setting that most of the treatments occur. We know that early intervention is absolutely critical in getting people back into good health, and of course we know that those with eating disorders have statistically been over-represented, sadly, in our suicide figures. That is why these programs are designed in a way to ensure that early intervention is at the heart of them.

#### **Ministers statements: water policy**

**Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:54):** I rise today to advise the house that the Allan Labor government is protecting the nation’s food bowl and the future of our rural and regional communities while also meeting our obligations and commitments under the Murray–Darling Basin plan. We have got a really long and demonstrated history of improving waterway health, and we have been continuing with that work by protecting environments and rivers from climate change and degradation. We have invested hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of hours in protecting our living wetlands, rivers and flood plains and improving the efficiency of our critical irrigation networks. The Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project, a series of projects which people are aware of in this place and indeed out on the ground, will protect around 14,000 hectares of very, very precious Victorian environment by getting water onto flood plains using pumps and regulators in the absence of overbank flooding events.

In releasing our prospectus *Planning our Basin Future Together: A Prospectus to Safeguard Victoria’s Environments and Communities in the Murray–Darling Basin*, we are then building on the work with, by and for communities to ensure that further water recovery in Victoria can occur without the blunt open-tender water purchases being proposed by the Commonwealth. This is a process of engagement, of collaboration and indeed of negotiation. We will work with and I will work with basin communities

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to identify innovative new alternatives to open-tender water purchases. I am really determined to make sure that we build upon those many months of discussions, meetings, visits and work alongside communities to deliver healthy waterways and resilient communities now and into the future. Achieving a healthy basin will make everyone receive the benefits now and into the long term. I am looking forward to the next ministerial council and continuing that work.

### Written responses

**The PRESIDENT** (12:56): Can I thank Minister Blandthorn, who will get both the answers from the Minister for Government Services for Mrs Tyrrell's questions.

**Sarah Mansfield**: On a point of order, President, I would just like to request a written response to both my substantive and my supplementary questions as I do not believe that they were answered.

**The PRESIDENT**: I will review them this afternoon and get back to the house later today.

**Sitting suspended 12:57 pm until 2:02 pm.**

### Constituency questions

#### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): (888) My question is for the Minister for Education. Last week Shadow Minister for Early Childhood and Education Jess Wilson and I visited Glen Waverley South Primary School and met with principal Con Vellios. Glen Waverley South is in the process of constructing a new building. The construction project has taken two years to complete and is running a bit behind schedule. The transition date to the new building has now moved from holiday dates to in-term dates, and the school needs an additional pupil-free day to facilitate the transition. An extra day would significantly improve the logistics and minimise disruption to classes and school routine. The additional day is crucial for ensuring a smooth and efficient relocation process for staff and students. My question to the minister is: will you allow the leadership of Glen Waverley South Primary School an additional pupil-free day to make sure they can manage the transition and set up this new teaching space?

#### Northern Victoria Region

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:03): (889) My constituency question is for the Minister for Racing in the other place. Last week it was alleged that wild brumbies in New South Wales were killed and sold to greyhound trainers in my electorate of Northern Victoria. In April more than 500 butchered horse carcasses were discovered at a Wagga Wagga property in New South Wales owned by horse trader Adrian Talbot. There are now suspicions that these horses were wild brumbies removed from the Kosciuszko National Park under claims that they would be rehomed. Instead it appears they have wound up dead and fed to greyhounds in this state. As shocking as it is, I cannot say that I am surprised. It is an ongoing partnership. Can the minister confirm if Victoria's greyhound racing industry is investigating the involvement of the northern Victorian trainers in this illegal knackery operation?

#### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:04): (890) Last Monday when I was walking into my electorate office I had the chance to meet Hiba and her daughter Latifa, who had come down to get some help from my team loading their digital licences up, as Latifa has just recently got her full licence and her own car. So a big congratulations to Latifa, and I will look out for you and your little Honda Jazz around our streets. Hiba, being the loving mum that she is, has a load of questions around the roads in Brunswick and surrounds where she lives and wants to know what the government is doing to upgrade and maintain roads. My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place: what is the Allan Labor government doing to invest in roads and road safety in my electorate of the Northern Metropolitan Region?

**Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:05): (891) My constituency question is for the Premier. Like my last question to her, now two weeks overdue, it concerns the resignation of the member for South Barwon. The Premier can hardly have forgotten the issue. Just yesterday she announced the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024, ironically describing it as ‘overdue’. She also appointed a Parliamentary Secretary for Men’s Behaviour Change. My question to her is: has she directed as her parliamentary secretary’s first duty to seek behaviour change from the member for South Barwon, whose continued absence from Parliament is denying his constituents a voice, or to ask him to resign from the Labor Party and leave Parliament? Either way, as I asked her before, when will she inform voters, who currently see only newspaper leaks from Labor Party colleagues, of the nature and seriousness of the allegations which necessitated their MP’s dismissal from her government and the parliamentary party?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): (892) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing. Nearly 2000 residents of Port Melbourne have signed a petition about the redevelopment of the Barak Beacon former public housing site by Homes Victoria, ‘Reduce Barak Beacon’. The petition agrees that housing density should be increased on the site and agrees with the medium-density housing towers that were originally proposed for the site in information distributed to local residents by Homes Victoria. Additionally, and importantly, the petition calls for an increase in the proportion of public housing at the site. This group of residents were happy with their previous neighbours, 100 per cent of whom were public housing tenants. Minister, will you agree to meet with this group?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:06): (893) My question is to the Minister for Health, and the question is: how is the government planning for the future of health care in the Southern Metropolitan Region? With over 74,000 presentations in the emergency department and trauma unit, the Alfred hospital in our electorate of Southern Metro is at the forefront of health services in the southern parts of Melbourne and obviously as a statewide provider. In the recent state budget the Alfred received \$118 million to sustain their health services. The funds are going to be used for essential capital works to help maintain operating theatres, intensive care and inpatient units so the hospital can continue their life-saving work. During a recent visit to the Alfred with you, Acting President Berger, and with the Deputy Premier we toured the first-class research facilities at the Burnet Institute and also at the Alfred itself, which is home to the highest number of clinical trials in the state. The government is committed to enhancing health facilities and services to ensure that every Victorian will have the best possible health care.

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:07): (894) My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the other place. The Glenroy RSL has faced a torrid time under this government. Following a botched licensing process, Glenroy RSL was charged by the government for poker machines it could not use due to local government restrictions. It was faced with aggressive letters from the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission telling them to ‘use it or lose it’, despite it being unlawful for them to do so. Following the government’s capitulation on the entitlements it could not legally use, Glenroy RSL was given just three days to read and sign a new deed to avoid having to pay for their surrendered entitlements. To avoid paying interest they paid the full amount, but having signed the new deed, the VGCCC will not repay the difference, basically saying ‘Bad luck’ to the Glenroy RSL, which has paid about \$70,000 for entitlements it did not and cannot use. Minister, will you intervene to ensure a fair outcome for the Glenroy RSL?



**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:08): (895) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I ask that she make Murray Road in Coburg safer for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. For years the community in Coburg has advocated for a reduction in lanes, lower speed limits, wider footpaths and protected bike paths on Murray Road. This stretch of road sits at the heart of the community, near shops, schools, a children's centre and preschool, Pentridge, Coburg Lake and the Merri Creek. A recent council survey found that 26 per cent of cars on the road were speeding beyond the legal limit, some reaching 80 kilometres per hour. The footpaths are narrow, designated crossings are sparse and car accidents are frequent, making this stretch of road a risk to the lives of locals. The parliamentary inquiry into vulnerable road users found that many Victorians did not feel safe around roads and made recommendations for reform. It is imperative that the government act on those without delay, and Murray Road is an important place to start.

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:09): (896) My question is to the Premier. A retrospective planning overlay has been imposed on hundreds of existing homes in Wonthaggi North, and this is causing untold stress to residents – from the young family who cannot build their deck for their kids to play on to the home owners who have been told that the value of their house has dropped from \$800,000 to \$650,000 in the last month. There is also another young couple I spoke to who have bought a block of land and have been told that at this stage they are not allowed to build on it. So far residents that are looking for answers and a bit of reassurance who have tried to contact the Minister for Planning have only received a generic email in response, with no answers and no timelines. That is why now I am asking the Premier. My question is: the opposition has committed to ripping up the Labor government's unfair retrospective decision; will the Premier do the right thing by the people of Wonthaggi North and do the same?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:10): (897) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. When will the upgrade works on the Wanganui Road–Ford Road–Goulburn Valley Highway intersection begin, and when will they be completed? In the 2017–18 budget \$10.2 million was allocated towards the Shepparton bypass, with \$2.6 million for planning and \$7.6 million of capital expenditure for preconstruction works, set to be completed by quarter 3 of 2019–20 – almost five years ago. The \$7.6 million in capital expenditure was to include upgrade works for a major Goulburn Valley Highway intersection at Ford Road and Wanganui Road that was reported to include a roundabout. The \$7.6 million is still a line item in the 2024–25 state budget, with a revised completion date of quarter 2 in 2024–25 – the end of this year and almost five years overdue. A footnote for that budget line – *(Time expired)*

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (14:11): (898) My question is to the Minister for Health. Constituents in Bendigo have contacted me outraged by the Labor government's decision to slash a staggering 75 per cent of funding from the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance in the state budget. The Liberals and Nationals ask the minister to reverse this decision and restore funding to the VCCC Alliance. Families across Northern Victoria have been impacted by cancer, including my own, and the number of Victorians diagnosed with cancer is continuing to rise. 35,000 Victorians were diagnosed with cancer in 2022, and rates are worse in regional areas. Regional Victorians are 10 per cent more likely to be diagnosed than those in major cities and 47 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma. Lung cancer is more common, and head and neck cancers are 33 per cent higher, in regional males. Over the last 30 years Victoria has led the way with cancer research, and this massive funding cut makes no sense. It will slash vital cancer research programs, lead to a loss of jobs and reduce the support available to patients.

*Motions***Suburban Rail Loop**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:13): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) fresh doubts surround the future of the most expensive transport infrastructure project in Victoria's history following confirmation the federal budget contains no additional funding for the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) East;
- (2) in 2022, the Victorian Labor government stated that the \$34.5 billion SRL East would be funded through three equal \$11.5 billion contributions from the Victorian state government, the federal government and new taxes via 'value capture' initiatives;
- (3) to date, the federal Labor government has committed just \$2.2 billion towards the project, with federal minister for infrastructure Catherine King stating that no further money will be provided until the project has been assessed by Infrastructure Australia;
- (4) with federal Labor now walking away from the project, the Allan Labor government faces a \$20 billion funding shortfall for the SRL East as it boasts of preparing to sign all main works contracts by 2026;
- (5) the independent Parliamentary Budget Office has costed stages 1 and 2 of the project at \$216 billion;
- (6) this wasteful spend means Victorians living in growth areas and regional Victoria will miss out on essential infrastructure projects;
- (7) with a \$20 billion funding shortfall, Premier Jacinta Allan must explain what new taxes will be raised and what other desperately needed infrastructure projects across Victoria will be cancelled to pay for the SRL East;

and calls on the Allan Labor government to pause the SRL East and not enter into any further contracts.

It is a privilege to speak on this motion. It is a really important motion, I think, on the future of Victoria and the legacy that will be left by this government in regard to the Suburban Rail Loop. You cannot really go through a morning without opening up the newspaper to see more stories about the failures of this dogged project that this government has embarked upon – mostly behind closed doors – whether it be federal Minister Catherine King pouring cold water on the project or holding back secret reports. We think, given the scandals with this program, that it is important to bring this motion forward.

It is the most expensive transport infrastructure project in Victorian history. The federal budget contains no – none, zero – additional funding for the Suburban Rail Loop East. In 2022 the Victorian Labor government stated that \$34.5 billion for the SRL East would be funded through three equal \$11.5 billion contributions from the Victorian state government, the federal government and new taxes, meaning value capture initiatives. The federal government has committed just \$2.2 billion towards the project, with federal minister for infrastructure Catherine King stating that no further money will be provided until the project is assessed by Infrastructure Australia. So federal Labor is basically walking away from the project. The Allan government faces a \$20 billion funding shortfall for the SRL East as it boasts that it is preparing to sign all main contracts by September 2026. With more contracts to come in September, it is important to bring forward this motion to hold this tired, decade-old government to account.

The independent Parliamentary Budget Office has costed stages 1 and 2 of the project at \$216 billion. This wasteful spend means that Victorians living in growth areas and in regional Victoria will miss out on essential infrastructure projects – certainly in my electorate I know that to be true. With a \$20 billion funding shortfall, Premier Jacinta Allan must explain what new taxes will be raised and what other desperately needed infrastructure projects across Victoria will be cancelled to pay for the SRL East. Of course we call on the Labor government to pause the SRL and not enter into any further contracts.

I know there are some members of cabinet and their party room that are quite keen to pause this project – maybe put it off into the future – and get going on other projects that are more important to

Victorians. We join those calls saying the government should pause this project. The Suburban Rail Loop is the most expensive but least scrutinised project in Victorian history. The Parliamentary Budget Office has costed the first two stages of the project alone at \$125 billion, 2½ times what the Premier promised for the whole thing, and \$216 billion including operating costs – \$216 billion. Already a \$6.9 billion cost blowout is expected, as indicated by the Auditor-General's *Major Projects Performance Reporting 2023* report, but Labor has hidden that in the budget.

It was extraordinary to see the performances of the Premier and the minister at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Costs have gone up about 20 per cent across the country and in Victoria. Apparently the Suburban Rail Loop is going to be quarantined. I know they do not like talking about quarantine, but it is going to be quarantined from any cost blowouts across the state and across the country. This must be an incredible project that it could somehow live in a bubble – in a tunnel. There is a tunnel around inflationary cost blowouts, a lot of them caused by the effect of their mismanaged Big Build. It is just absurd that this government is still pursuing this project and still straight-up lying to the Victorian people that this project will somehow be quarantined from cost blowouts. It is absolutely absurd.

The project has not been assessed by either Infrastructure Australia or Infrastructure Victoria – that body that Daniel Andrews specifically set up to 'take the politics out of infrastructure'. You know that one they set up, on the other side of the house, that was going to take the politics out of infrastructure? It was going to plan based on need, not based on something that was cooked up in a far-flung office at PwC. No, Infrastructure Victoria did not do that. The PTV, Public Transport Victoria, provides development plans on what is needed in the future based on experts – not PwC consultants, but experts. Were any of those projects taken up? Was the *Western Rail Plan* taken up? Was the northern loop line taken up? It would have connected the Upfield line and the Craigieburn line and electrified the line to Wallan. No, because Labor is focused on this absolute vanity project that is going to suck up every single taxpayer dollar and infrastructure project not just for this generation but for the one after that and the one after that. It is an absurd project, and what it is doing is robbing the next generation of getting the infrastructure that they deserve.

It is like they have not ever visited Melton. It is like they have not ever visited Wyndham Vale. It is like they have not ever visited Wallan and they have not ever visited Clyde, because they do not care about people living in growth areas or living in regional Victoria that are desperate for their infrastructure. Our fellow Victorians in regional Victoria cannot even drive from A to B without hitting dangerous potholes, yet this government wants to embark on a vanity project called the Suburban Rail Loop East, which has already blown out its costs. We are told that it is going to be quarantined from any sort of cost blowouts that are happening everywhere else, even though there is \$40 billion of cost blowouts on infrastructure projects that Jacinta Allan is responsible for. She has been at the table as the minister for everything that has gone wrong, from the Commonwealth Games – \$600 million of money down the toilet – to \$40 billion of infrastructure blowouts, yet we are meant to believe that the Suburban Rail Loop will somehow be quarantined from all these blowouts. It is ridiculous. Then you have got this value capture, which is an exercise in property speculation that relies on 40-storey towers in Box Hill, 25-storey towers around Monash and Glen Waverley, 20-storey towers in Clayton and 18-storey towers in Cheltenham. We still have no detail from the minister on the value-capture mechanism.

I know Mr Welch has been visiting many businesses and locals concerned about their shrinking open space, concerned about the amount of space all these different ventilation stacks and all sorts of things are taking up, all for an absolute vanity project of the former Premier. But we have got to remember Jacinta Allan was Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop; she is completely tied to every decision Daniel Andrews made. We heard the backgrounding comments from Labor ministers and MPs over the weekend that they cooked up too much at the election and of course some promises were going to have to be broken. If there is any that should be broken, it is this one. But they are continuing on with the former Premier's vanity project, written up in some far-flung office at PwC. Again, Minister

Pearson said the government has not identified a value capture mechanism and has not decided who will pay. That should worry all Victorians and has not forecast how much they aim to raise in each precinct.

The federal government has committed no further funding until there is an independent process. Now is not the time to lock Victorians into a multibillion-dollar contract and spend a generation's worth of infrastructure funding. The northern and western sections are not actually costed, are not planned and have not been committed to, and they would not even be built until around 2053. I know the Minister for Planning came out to Broadmeadows and was asked specific questions about the future Broadmeadows station – would not have a clue. I do not reckon the Premier has got a clue. I do not reckon the secretary and the department have got a clue – because it is all thought up, put on the back of a coaster in a PwC office, all for an exercise in vanity. The SRL is not supported by any transport expert, and according to the Auditor-General it will only return 51 cents of community benefit for every dollar it costs, before blowouts and using the SRL authority's very optimistic figures.

Labor cannot manage money, they cannot manage projects and it is clear Victorians are paying the price. Victorians are furious, because you have got ministers contradicting each other on the airport rail, you have got the airport rail being put off, but not the SRL. You have got four-year-old pre-prep being put off, but not the SRL. You have got mental health locals being put off, like the one that was promised in Craigieburn in my electorate, being put off, but not the SRL. Why is that? It is because this government cannot manage money. It wastes taxpayer money; it mismanages taxpayer money. This is a project dreamt up by Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan. She was the minister. It has already faced blowouts. She is responsible for \$40 billion of infrastructure blowouts. She was the minister for the Commonwealth Games – \$600 million down the toilet.

This is a vanity project. The SRL is the most secretive and unscrutinised project in Victorian history. A bit of a history lesson for those opposite: it was originally named Operation Halo. Board members of the government agency responsible for delivery knew nothing about it until it was announced. Senior public servants enlisted to give advice were legally gagged from sharing it with their bosses. Labor MPs and ministers were kept in the dark, except for a gang of five: Tim Pallas, James Merlino, Gavin Jennings, Daniel Andrews and of course Jacinta Allan. Thirty private consultants worked on the project in secret at the PwC offices in Melbourne – they have got a great reputation recently, haven't they – and they were required to sign a non-disclosure agreement barring them from discussing their work with anyone from outside the project team, including their bosses. No documents were allowed to leave the locked rooms.

On the day it was announced it had not been scrutinised by the Department of Transport and Planning. It had never been reviewed by the independent infrastructure body Infrastructure Victoria, which they themselves set up to manage against these kind of brain farts. It was not on any earlier planning documents, like the PTV development plans that experts contribute to that map a future for growth based on need around Victoria – yet this government would rather outsource all that to tax evasion central over there. They would rather outsource to tax evasion central their policy development process. It still has not been costed by Infrastructure Victoria – no cost-benefit analysis by Infrastructure Australia – and this government has the gall to go begging cap in hand to the Commonwealth and get Labor to commit \$2 billion to the project. That \$2 billion is actually not certain. They think it is, but it is actually not certain, and I would be concerned about that over \$2 billion as well.

Any federal minister – and I know; I have heard them – that goes around town in Victoria or around Australia cannot believe the government is proceeding with the SRL. They cannot believe it. They think it is stupid. So do we – we agree with them. Their federal team are not happy about it. I tell you what, the Victorian people, particularly those in the western suburbs and north-eastern suburbs, cannot believe that a good project like the airport rail link has been put off into the never-never but they are still continuing with the SRL. They cannot believe it. It beggars belief – it absolutely beggars belief –

that this government would continue with a project that they came up with down at tax evasion city instead of a project like the airport rail, which has been longed for for decades by Victorians.

This government went to not one but two elections stating that only Labor will electrify the train lines to Melton and Wyndham Vale – only Labor will do that. So you had two elections, 2018 and 2022, promising this project. It does not happen. It has not happened. I tell you what, we were down in south-west Melbourne in Werribee a few weeks ago for shadow cabinet with about 100 members of the community, every single one of them furious that they are being ignored – absolutely. It is the same in my electorate in the north as well. You have got a situation where the Craigieburn line, despite having more users – there are more users on the Craigieburn line – has half the amount of frequency as the Frankston line. Ridiculous. Labor views these seats as seats for life, as absolute seats for life. I am here to tell you they are not. We are coming after them and tying this government to its absurd decision to commit Victoria to an outrageous project, to commit Victoria to a project that has not had a business case, that does not have a plan, that has no cost–benefit analysis.

If you want to defend the Suburban Rail Loop, come in, spinner, because we will not have it. We will be tying you to this. You have delayed the airport rail. You have delayed the *Western Rail Plan*. You are not committing to any electrification in growth areas that desperately need electrification, that desperately need rail services. You are saying no to that, but you are going to connect a rail line between two rail lines that already have established public transport links. That is what they want to do – connect two rail lines with existing public transport links with frequency that is much better than in the outer west and the outer north. That is what they want to do. They want to look after people – everyone in the east. Even people in the east now, from what I am hearing, are very much not happy with the Suburban Rail Loop. It is the inequity of this government. This government always talks about how equality is not negotiable; where is the equality in punching billions of dollars into the eastern suburbs and not into the western suburbs or the northern suburbs?

Even if you supported this project, if Labor gave a damn about the punters in the western suburbs and the lack of services they are provided every day, they would have started it over in Werribee and then worked their way around. But no – this was all a political exercise. No expert advice, no cost–benefit analysis – it was a political exercise dreamt up at tax evasion city, all for the former Premier's ego. And the current Premier was there, the current Premier was in the locked room, part of the gang of five that made all the decisions. This is a project that has already blown out. It is actually not worth the paper it is written on. This government wants to continue going on with this project, it wants to continue signing contracts, even though you have got an absolute litany of experts saying that it is a money sink and saying you have got a credit rating warning against the government's debt position. It does not know where the funding is coming from. Its federal Labor colleagues will not even agree with them and tip in money – no, they will not.

They have chucked, what, \$3.74 billion into the North East Link? The thing they have to answer as well is: would their federal colleagues have contributed that \$3.7 billion to the North East Link if Jacinta Allan had not blown out that budget by \$10 billion? No, because it would not have been required. The previous Liberal government had already contributed to that project, then Jacinta Allan and Danny Pearson front up and reveal a \$10 billion blowout and then the feds have to come save the day. They would not be contributing to that project were it not for Jacinta Allan's blowouts. We have already seen a blowout on this project. We have seen over \$40 billion of blowouts across all her infrastructure projects – that is Jacinta Allan's legacy. There is no business case. As I said, 51 cents of community benefit for every dollar spent – \$216 billion.

The federal Treasurer said that state governments must make tough decisions to prevent inflation rising, but they would rather see interest rates go up in growth areas than have to abandon a crazy project like the Suburban Rail Loop. You are starving the rest of the state of the infrastructure that they deserve. That is why you have delayed airport rail. That is why the Deputy Premier is running around trying to defend this government for the fact that we do not have an airport rail loop, for the fact that

we do not have a western rail plan. You promised at two separate elections a western rail plan. It has never happened. The government needs to pause this absurd project.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:33): Maybe we can all just calm down a little bit in here now; it was a bit angry over there, talking about Suburban Rail Loop. But I am very pleased to rise to talk on this motion, because even though it is a motion that seeks to condemn the project, I know – and I know this only too well – that there were two elections that Victorians got to vote on this project and they have done it, twice. So I think that the Victorian public have given us a mandate to actually proceed with this project, and it is a fantastic project.

I was listening to Mr Mulholland, and of course I have had an opportunity to look at the basis of the motion. It really is astounding, and it just seems that those opposite really do not believe in public transport, because we know they do not believe in public anything. They want everything to be private, just to make sure that their rich mates actually make lots of money at the expense of Victorians. You only have to look at energy policy in that respect – they have got these rich multinational corporations ripping millions and millions of dollars out of Victoria and it all goes overseas. But at least our government, what we do is, when we commit to a project we are going to make sure we get on and deliver it. This project, Suburban Rail Loop, and the first part of it, the east, is actually in my electorate, the electorate of the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. It is fantastic.

I am going to directly address some of the, I guess, misinformation or disinformation or however you want to describe it that Mr Mulholland went to in his contribution, because it really is –

**Evan Mulholland:** Please.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Do not worry. A good thing is that no-one is listening to you, and that is why you are in electoral Siberia, because you are the worst opposition in history and everyone knows it. You have just got to ask Victorians, who gave us a massive majority in the last election.

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I know that is lost on you over there. Let me just go to a couple of things. As of today, there are over 17,000 Victorians directly employed on our Big Build programs. For every 100 jobs on the Big Build there are 200 more supported through the supply chain. Jobs are good for Victorians. They actually contribute to the economy – remember that thing? It is funny about that. More than 277 million hours have been worked across our Big Build projects so far; 9 million hours have been clocked up by trainees, apprentices and cadets since 2016; and 5 million hours have been worked by Aboriginal people in the Big Build. That is absolutely fantastic, because not only do we get the opportunity with our Big Build program to build fantastic projects like the Suburban Rail Loop, we get to do some fantastic social procurement like the stuff I just mentioned – like engaging apprentices, cadets and also Aboriginal people to make sure that they get a share of the benefits of working on some of these Big Build projects.

This Suburban Rail Loop benefit – it is just going to be amazing. As we know, this first tranche will run from Cheltenham to Box Hill. It will slash travel times and it will connect people on the Gippsland corridor to create up to 8000 direct jobs as well. Construction started in June 2022, and trains will be running by 2035. Tunnel-boring machines will be in the ground and digging tunnels by 2026 – in two short years. It is going to happen. Currently there are 1200 workers helping to build it, and by 2026 we will have 4000 workers. These are jobs for Victorians who are going to directly benefit by being employed on this project. And it is a multidecade project, which means it will generate thousands of direct and indirect jobs, which is good for Victorians and is good for our economy.

Why would we not proceed with a project like this? Why would we – I know, because those opposite do nothing. That is why we have had to step into the breach, because you do nothing over there. All I hear from those opposite is constant criticism, and the criticism is really misinformed. I am going to go to some of this. It is going to be amazing, because this is just ridiculous, completely ridiculous.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I already dispelled yesterday, Mr Mulholland, some of the disinformation that you were putting out there, so I am very happy to talk about facts. Just in terms of why we have to deliver this project – again, what is lost on those opposite is we know we have got the single biggest investment in public housing in a generation in Victoria, and this is why this is important as well. In 2050 Melbourne will be home to around 9 million people, which is roughly the size of London. What do you do if you do not have a good public transport system?

**A member** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Of course they did. If you do not have a good public transport system, no-one can get around. You cannot turn around and plan for that growth in 2045 if you do not start planning today and start putting that funding in. When Mr Mulholland talks about federal funding – and I will just say, we have been really clear on the costs of SRL and SRL East. It was costed at \$30 billion to \$34.5 billion, and we are on track to hit that target. We have been very transparent about it, and our recent budget continues to show those estimates. We have worked with the Commonwealth government and welcome their \$2.2 billion initial investment. That point was lost on you, Mr Mulholland. It is an initial investment, because you know what? There is a thing where every year budgets get delivered, whether it is a state budget or a federal budget. So we are very hopeful and optimistic that there will be further contributions in the future from the federal government, because as the Prime Minister said when he announced the funding commitment, ‘I can’t think of a more exciting infrastructure project in the entire nation, and that’s why federal Labor will contribute an initial contribution of \$2.2 billion to this project.’ He added, ‘It will do what great cities do.’ That is what our Prime Minister has said in regard to this project, so again, it completely smashes the rhetoric of those opposite.

Let me go to the Parliamentary Budget Office costings. The costings they quote are actually ludicrous, including costs to build and operate SRL North and SRL East into the 2080s, replace trains multiple times – blah, blah, blah. Despite the framing of the dodgy question, the PBO report actually makes it very clear once again that the cost to build SRL East is well within the government’s estimate of \$30 billion to \$34.5 billion. That is what the PBO has said. So again, despite the spin and the rhetoric that comes from over there – it is really good when they bring these misguided and ill-informed motions, because we actually get to dispel the rhetoric and the rubbish that is coming from those opposite. We look forward to those opposite actually costing all their proposals with 50 years of operations built in, because it will be a real challenge for them because they actually have no alternatives. What is the alternative? Nothing, other than saying, ‘No, we’re going to cancel everything.’ Just no to everything. It is very easy to say no, but there is no alternative. There is no alternative anything right now. So again, it is wonderful to debate this motion, because it is so ill-informed and misguided.

Also, what they do not understand, as I said, is we are actually delivering on upgrades to other infrastructure, like upgrades on the Ballarat, Bendigo, Echuca, north-east, Warrnambool, Shepparton and Gippsland lines. There are projects that are already out delivering benefits for regional communities. There are 360 kilometres of new and upgraded tracks, and more than 80 level crossings have been upgraded across Victoria – gone. There are 18 new upgraded stations, here we go, at Cobblebank, Goornong, Huntly and Raywood, with 1000 new upgraded car spaces at Rockbank, Cobblebank, Huntly, Raywood, Mooropna and Murchison – but that is all lost on those opposite – Waurin Ponds, Bacchus Marsh and Ballan. We are bringing modern VLocity trains to Bairnsdale, Shepparton and Albury–Wodonga. It is pretty clear what we are doing. We have made clear commitments to the Victorian community about our plans and our programs. Whilst we build infrastructure, we recognise that we need to do both – we need to build roads and we also need to build modern public transport infrastructure projects, like the Suburban Rail Loop.

As I said, we have been to two elections where we have talked about this, and the Victorian communities have backed us in in spades. We will be continuing to deliver this project. I cannot wait to see it get completed, and I am sure that those opposite will not travel on it then because they hate it so much. They will not actually travel on it. If they really were true to their word and thought it was so ridiculous, I am sure that none of them would get on it because otherwise they would be hypocritical.

In the minute that I have left I have to tell the chamber a small story. When I was leaving here last night at about a quarter past 9, I happened to have the misfortune of walking out of the building behind Mr McGowan's car. If ever there was an advertisement for public transport, Mr McGowan's old banger would have to be it. It is a very old Bongo van, a petrol-driven old Bongo van. If ever there was an advertisement to get old bangers off the road, it is Mr McGowan's car. I was nearly asphyxiated by the pong coming out of that car. All I will say is we need to get vehicles off the roads, and these old vehicles just like that absolutely need to get off the road. This is why we need to build public transport infrastructure projects like Suburban Rail Loop.

This is a fantastic project despite what those opposite say. They really have nothing to add to the debate on this because they have no plans. They are the worst opposition in history. I am yet to hear any positive, optimistic anything from the opposition on their plans for either roads or rail or for anything else, whether it be hospitals, education, public anything, because we know they hate anything publicly funded. We will be voting against this motion, and we encourage everyone in this chamber to also vote against this motion.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): I will use my time today to talk about the overarching and structural problem that we face when discussing transport and major infrastructure projects here in Victoria. It is the lack of a long-term, transparent, integrated transport plan, which gets frequently in the history of our state cast aside in favour of chasing whatever project will give the government of the day the right media moments with hard hats and hi-vis. The Greens have been on record for decades arguing for more and better investment in public transport. There is merit in the concept of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) providing fast, high-capacity rail links between existing radial lines and connecting two unis to the heavy rail network for the first time. There is also devil in the details, and there is no doubt that there are substantive questions about the project that remain unanswered despite extensive investigation in terms of both process and outcomes.

For example, we recently heard in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that SRL station platforms are only currently planned to be built long enough for four carriages, matching the trains that will run from day one. If this is a generational investment in public transport as the government claims, what happens in a few decades when our population doubles –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Katherine COPSEY**: I am very much looking forward to the 2-minute trains; I have heard that – and we want to extend those trains in the future? How will we extend underground platforms without massive expense and disruption? Some of our current stations are well over a century old in the rail network. Will the SRL stations be futureproofed to 2050, let alone to the end of this century? Many SRL stations are designed to act as interchanges with existing stations. There are longstanding concerns about the design of those interchanges, with some SRL stations being up to 300 metres from their existing counterparts. Will a big, long walk like that allow for the kind of seamless integration that we see in successful lines in London or Tokyo? Probably not, I would argue.

The government is also granting significant planning powers over the areas around SRL stations and intends to develop these. Again, the Greens are on record, and have been for decades, supporting appropriate infill development, especially where this is transit oriented. However, we need to maintain the very necessary voice of communities in those developments, and this raises more questions: to what extent is this actually a transport project versus a development project? How have those different



priorities been weighed against each other in this development? Who is going to benefit financially from significant upzoning of this land? These design issues and unanswered questions are symptoms of overall planning process issues for SRL and emblematic of the wider issues that are always evident in transport infrastructure planning in Victoria.

When the Andrews Labor government came to power in 2014 they did so promising to axe the dud east-west link on the basis that it did not stack up and was not justified. We could have been forgiven for thinking we were entering a more enlightened age of transport planning. But after they got into government of course Transurban talked Labor into the massive West Gate Tunnel, which, like all big new urban freeways, will induce demand and make traffic worse. Not only that, it has been poorly executed, suffering from huge delays and blowouts. I saw reported the other day that the project's builders are now suing designers, claiming significant failures in basic requirements like steel gantries not complying with VicRoads specifications. But it was not just this dud road project. We got another surprise when Labor sprung the colossally wasteful and damaging North East Link on the people of Victoria.

On freight rail we have had years of dithering that has held up vital intermodal terminals in Melbourne's north and west. It finally appears that the northern terminal is proceeding, but we are concerned that it looks like Labor is throwing the equally important western terminal in the too-hard basket, a decision that will condemn the western suburbs to years more of dangerous, polluting trucks on their streets and Victorians at large to significantly more transport-related carbon emissions.

The level crossing removal project has been a real mixed bag. After many of the projects had been announced and picked, the government belatedly released a framework for prioritising crossings in October 2018, but even that framework does not seem to have been used for prioritisation of announcements after the election.

In the face of all this, other bang-for-buck and worthwhile projects go wanting: the electrification of Melton and Wyndham Vale rail; the duplication of the Upfield line; finally meeting our obligations to make tram stops accessible; reforming our bus networks to provide fast, frequent links where people need to go; and providing safe, separated cycling infrastructure throughout Melbourne and regional cities. I do wish the government all the best in their latest efforts to get airport rail back on track so we can finally see this long-promised project delivered.

All of these issues come back to the fact that Victoria has no published integrated transport plan, as required by legislation. The Transport Integration Act 2010 requires the government to prepare an integrated plan, but they consistently have failed to do so. We need a plan that has been prepared by professionals who work closely with the community to meet our community's needs for decades come.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:48): I am pleased to rise on this motion. There are a number of false premises built into this project, and I am going to go through a range of them. The first is that the entire premise starts with a circular logic. Why are we building this rail connection? It is because the population is coming there. Why is the population coming there? Because we are building the rail network. One presupposes the other supposedly and it is a circular argument. We must have the rail loop because the population is coming, but the population is coming because we are building the rail loop. The argument is that there is infrastructure in the east. Yes, there is infrastructure in the east, suitable for the population that exists there. It is not suitable for a doubling and tripling of that population, because if it was, you would not have to build the rail loop. The infrastructure clearly is not there for that extra population.

Of course the other false premise built around this –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Richard WELCH:** No. I will try and keep it simple for you if I can, Mr Galea. This goes to the root of the business case itself: there is no return on investment. Some estimates think we are going to get 30 cents to the dollar back in this. As has already been pointed out by Mr Mulholland, Infrastructure Victoria did not approve it. Infrastructure Australia are sitting on a report. I do wonder what will happen when that report comes out – what we will actually get to see eventually. So again there are two false premises.

Another common explanation we get is that Melbourne is going to be as big as London and London has an orbital train network. Well, I can tell you as someone who lived in London for a long time that London does not have an orbital train system at all. The closest thing it has is a line called the circle line, and the circle line occupies an area that does not go much outside Regents Park. It is a very small orbit. The other important thing about London is of course that that circle line was built nearly 100 years ago – some of it more than 100 years ago – and it was built at a time when there were absolutely no protections for open space. There were no protections for residents or communities in the way of those tunnels. In fact it was one of the most brutal examples of urban infrastructure development we have. It should be noted that the vast majority of businesses that rammed the circle line through the suburbs of London went broke. It was not financially viable. It should be noted that London's population at that time was not 7 million or 9 million. London's population at that time was 12 million people, in an urban footprint not much further than Preston. So it was far denser in population than we have in Melbourne and are likely to have in Melbourne at any time in the future. And the quality of life in London at that time at that density in that area was barely past Dickensian. This is the last template we would want for Melbourne. No-one in Melbourne wants this. No-one in Melbourne has asked for this, least of all the people in the suburbs where this is being imposed.

It is also clear that London is supported by a magnificent bus network and other transport links. The London Underground would not function if it was not for the bus network, and indeed a bus network would be a far simpler, faster, cheaper, more efficient and more appropriate to-scale solution than the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL). It is something that could be delivered far sooner far cheaper. The bus network is indispensable to the operation of the much-lauded London Underground, which is a point that is sorely overlooked. We could deliver that much faster and sooner.

The other point of course is one which is well made, which is the use of capital for productive or non-productive purposes. An economy – the state economy – has only so much capital to invest, and it only in fact has so much capital it can feasibly borrow. It is important then that that capital is put to what they call 'productive' purposes. There is very, very good economic evidence that cities that invest non-productive purposes go into a malaise. The best examples of that are cities that host the Olympics. Cities since the war who have hosted the Olympics and poured their productive capital into non-productive purposes such as stadiums and some connecting roads there generally have gone into economic decline for about 20 years subsequent to that, including Melbourne, including Sydney. It certainly includes Montreal. It includes Rome and includes most cities that do it.

We need our capital put to its most productive purposes, particularly if we are talking about the transport component. The best example of the trade-off here – the quid pro quo – is we are not doing the western interstate freight terminal. WIFT is essential to our freight efficiency. It is essential productive capital that would improve the economics of this state, would reduce freight costs by up to 40 per cent and would get trucks off our roads. That is where our capital should be going. A tunnel through the eastern suburbs going north to south for no particular market will not add to this state's wealth, it will rob it, and it will rob it deeply because it is \$40 billion on this and then another \$160 million or \$170 million beyond that.

Productive capital is essential. I can cite another example: in India they put their capital into productive infrastructure such as airports. Before they built a series of airports around the nation, it was extremely difficult to do business in that nation. They put their money into airports and suddenly it opened up the regions. It opened up economic development to whole areas of India that did not have access to

trade and commerce, because they put their infrastructure where it was needed and where it would generate wealth.

It remains utterly reckless for the government to go signing contracts for non-productive purposes, and signing contracts in a context where so many details of the scope and the time and the scale and the risk and the planning of all this remains ill defined. If you sign contracts in that context, it is inevitable that the risk of the project is going to fall back on the state, not the developers. The state is heavily in debt. It is losing frontline services. It is under review by credit agencies. We could have had \$40 billion of budget repair right there to save any future downgrade of our credit rating, but it was quarantined and they chose not to. The government wants to pretend that there is no cost to this choice. There is a cost to this choice, and it has been cited already – the loss of frontline services, the loss of other opportunities for economic development in this state, all for a suburban vanity project that serves no direct purpose other than property speculation.

The other furphy is the benefit to the community, because the people of Box Hill, Glen Waverley and Burwood are probably almost the last in line in terms of consideration here. It has been said repeatedly that the SRL went to two elections. I am sure the brand name ‘SRL’ went to two elections, and a press release –

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Richard WELCH:** It was originally ‘SRL Airport’, indeed, Mr Mulholland. Certainly people said, ‘Okay, on the notion, on what we know, that might be a good idea.’ And then the details started to come out. I can absolutely guarantee you – it is a matter of fact – that no-one told these communities that there were going to be 40-storey-plus residential buildings. No-one told the businesses of that area there would be 10 years of disruption to their businesses, perhaps never to return. No-one told us that this train network would never be directly connected to the rest of the transport network. No-one told us that the trains themselves would not even be the same gauge as the rest of our transport network, so this is going to be an outlier piece of technology. No-one told this community that there would be no matching social infrastructure.

When we talk about the area, we have a number of schools in the area. They are all at capacity, they all have their open space being intruded upon. Indeed Box Hill High School, which I visited recently, has absolutely no open space in the school at all, not even a soccer field. It has one indoor basketball court, no playing fields at all, for 1500 students. Across the road from that school they are building a 40-storey apartment building as part of the SRL. Where are the students – (*Time expired*)

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (14:58): Once again we have an opposition that proposes to stop something. Does that sound familiar? While the Allan Labor government is focused on delivering the projects Victorians need, those opposite only take shots from the side while never delivering anything. We will not be lectured by the opposition. When they were in government, they did not deliver a major project, because they have a very strong record of stopping things and looking for every opportunity to cancel projects. Not content with trying to stop the Suburban Rail Loop, the opposition is also currently fearmongering about hospital closures – indeed we were being lectured by a former local member from Warrnambool Denis Naphine about this very matter this week. It really showed breathtaking hypocrisy, because he showed a remarkable propensity to stop things when he was a minister in the Kennett government. They literally closed down regional hospitals – not enhanced regional hospitals but closed them down. I will give you a list of closed hospitals under the Kennett government: Eildon, Murtoa, Red Cliffs, Clunes, Beeac, Birregurra, Lismore, Elmore, Waygara, Macarthur in my electorate – in fact in Denis Naphine’s own electorate, and Koroit in my electorate and Mortlake. Several other hospitals were privatised, in particular Traralgon and Mildura. I know the Labor government has corrected that, much to the absolute delight of the Mildura community.

It is tragic up until this day that the opposition also gutted TAFEs. So again the coalition's track record speaks for itself. When last in power they cut hundreds of millions of dollars out of the TAFE sector, crippling TAFE institutes. TAFEs posted record deficits, sacked staff and closed campuses, including Lilydale and Greensborough. Seventy jobs alone were lost in Warrnambool at South West TAFE. The Liberals' chokehold on TAFE funding has been a key driver for the lack of tradies at the moment –

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, Acting President, I read the motion really carefully and I could not see anything about TAFE. I am wondering whether the member has the right motion, so just on relevance.

**Ingrid Stitt:** On the point of order, Acting President, Mr Mulholland's contribution was pretty broad and did go to a range of different issues. He traversed a whole range of portfolios, including mental health, health – a number of them. So I think it is a bit rich him taking a point of order on Ms Ermacora's contribution, which she has barely begun.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** Unfortunately, I was not here to hear Mr Mulholland's words of wisdom. Perhaps, Ms Ermacora, you could get back to the motion at hand.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** So we are talking about the recent proposal from those opposite to stop yet another project. That is the theme, and I appreciate your effort. But that is the theme here and there is a pattern going on that gives us a clue of what those opposite might look like and what they might do if they formed government, and decimating TAFEs is only part of the story of what would happen if they formed government.

The closure of schools is also another thing that would happen if they formed government, based on the previous record under the Kennett government. Also, I would like to say that there were schools closed in my community – South Warrnambool Primary School was closed under the Kennett government. I have a story to tell about the closure of schools during the Kennett era. Very sadly my husband and I purchased some second-hand floorboards from a primary school in Kensington that was closed down by Jeff Kennett and those floorboards are in my dining room and back living room right now. That is the shame that we are reminded of over and over again.

I am particularly proud of how our government has reinvested in TAFEs, particularly under the leadership of Minister Gayle Tierney. I think it is a huge contrast to what is being proposed yet again here. It is a regrettable legacy to this day that Kennett closed 56 state schools, abolished 4000 teaching positions and sacked 3760 school cleaners and 830 administrative staff. In getting towards the end of my contribution, I really think that it is a bit rich. We have got this sort of proposal presented by Mr Pesutto only a few minutes ago across the road on the Great South Coast. 'We're really not that different to the government,' he was basically saying. 'We agree on a lot of things. We just disagree on how things are going to be done.' I kind of think, 'Oh, that gives us a bit of an idea of what they are thinking – don't worry about us.' But the truth is you will be closing things down because that is the pattern. That is your modus operandi.

I guess I might leave it at that, but really it is a reversion to type: 'Let's not go ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop. Let's sack 400 people who are currently working on that and go no further on it.' I really think that we need to be very careful as Victorians to hold the opposition to account on exactly what is being proposed, because you cannot say 'Fund this. Fund this' and complain about taxes at the same time. It just does not add up. I will finish there.

**Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (15:05):** I rise today to speak on Mr Mulholland's motion 422. On this motion I would like to touch on a few points. In my contribution I would like to emphasise that this is the most expensive transport infrastructure project in Victoria's history. In point (3):

to date, the federal Labor government has committed just \$2.2 billion towards the project, with federal minister for infrastructure Catherine King stating that no further money will be provided until the project has been assessed by Infrastructure Australia ...

I know my colleagues have addressed this motion and emphasised the poor investment that this Labor government has put towards the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) and the lack of a business case that the SRL has, but what I want to do in my contribution is address how this has affected my community out in the west, how it has put more burden on my constituents, how more taxes have been put on my constituents and how other projects have been cut and been delayed because of the SRL, because the government is putting all the money into one basket. I will briefly mention point (5) in this motion:

the independent Parliamentary Budget Office has costed stages 1 and 2 of the project at \$216 billion ...

That is what I will be speaking to in relation to the cost and what it means to my constituents in the west.

On this side of the chamber we stand for taxpayers, and we know that Labor cannot manage money. The Labor government spends money that it does not have. To do so, they are paying for the project by increasing tax and scrapping projects which are desperately needed. The facts are that at the moment current Victorian taxes are the highest. Victorians are already paying the highest taxes in Australia. On average each taxpayer pays \$5772. This is more than in any other state. Victorians are paying 73 per cent more than Tasmanians and 70 per cent more than South Australians, and compared to New South Wales, Victorians are paying 23 per cent more, so let us not forget New South Wales. Victoria has higher debt than New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland combined, so when the Labor government put all their money and focus into the SRL, the majority of Victorians suffer due to the lack of infrastructure which is required to keep Victoria running.

Point (2):

in 2022, the Victorian Labor government stated that the \$34.5 billion SRL East would be funded through three equal \$11.5 billion contributions from the Victorian state government, the federal government and new taxes via 'value capture' initiatives ...

The state government by all means will put in whatever they can by cutting other projects. The federal government is on pause at the moment. Where is that money coming from? The third one is tax. So at the moment we are looking at two-thirds of the \$34.5 billion, which they say is feasible, being paid by Victorians. By what means? Tax – more tax. So with Victorians paying the highest tax in Australia, we are looking again at paying more and more every day to compensate for their endeavour to finish the SRL project. To date the Albanese Labor government has committed only \$2.2 billion to the project.

**Michael Galea:** Only \$2.2 billion – that is quite a lot of money, Mr Luu.

**Trung LUU:** Only \$2.2 billion at this stage. Hopefully you would ask for more and maybe –

**A member** interjected.

**Trung LUU:** If it stacked up, then maybe the federal government would assist. Unfortunately, it does not stack up. The federal minister for infrastructure Catherine King stated that no further money will be provided to the project, which has to be assessed by Infrastructure Australia.

The SRL has been one of the most expensive transport projects ever undertaken in Victoria. It will be a burden on the average Victorian for many decades to come. The question is whether spending all this money on one project is the right thing to do, especially when the country is going through a cost-of-living crisis and all major infrastructure and critical services are paying the price. With the federal government walking away from the project, I have to ask: what are we doing? What is this Labor government leading Victorians into?

I mentioned my Western Metropolitan electorate – what are we missing out on? The electrified Melton railway line was promised by this Labor government in their 2018 campaign pledge. It was a feasible project – at the time the transport infrastructure minister said it was feasible – and they pledged to have the Melton line electrified. And yet it has been scrapped to prioritise the SRL. That is one line

connected to my west that has gone. The other one, the Wyndham line, exactly the same thing – again, it has been sacrificed for the SRL. At the moment, what is the west getting out of this? Zilch. Cancelled project after cancelled project. And that is not to mention the airport railway link.

Local communities like Tarneit, Deer Park, Ardeer, Cobblebank, Rockbank and Caroline Springs in my electorate are still looking forward to critical upgrades and essential improvements to their public transport to accommodate the growing population in the area. Yet the west is now faced with the most congested and dangerous roads in Melbourne. When projects are delayed and rail improvements are cancelled, it means more families are forced onto poorly maintained local roads that are bursting at the seams. In recent times Brimbank City Council has written to the minister indicating they cannot afford to cover three-quarters of the cost for the state government in maintaining arterial roads, due to rising costs. Everything is going to the SRL. Out west, we are suffering. We are paying more tax and projects are being cancelled and delayed. They are saying – not me, but many, many of my constituents – the west is being neglected. Decade after decade nothing has changed. Another example is that the Manorvale Primary School in Melton and Melton South Primary School upgrades, promised by this government, have been cut. Why? Because the SRL is going ahead.

In the last few minutes of my contribution I want to express that it is not only that there is no business case and it does not stack up, but is it really worth it for all Victorians if we put all the money into the SRL when all the critical infrastructure and all the critical services are paying the price to have the eastern section doubling up on the railway line? Just think about it: what are we actually doing? Are we catering for the eastern side or are we catering for all Victorians? That is all the services, all the critical infrastructure and the taxes we are paying to make ends meet and put food on our table.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:14): I rise to speak on motion 422 moved by Mr Mulholland. It has seven parts, and notice was given last sitting week. Mr Mulholland has given me plenty of time to prepare, so I thank him for this contribution today. This motion regards the eastern stretch of the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), a project that will change our state. I remind Mr Mulholland that the eastern suburbs, which I hope he knows a bit about, sent a resounding message to Victorian Liberals by voting for the project twice. I was at a pre-poll every day in the lead-up to the election, and in between all the noise in the electorate of Ashwood – I was supporting my good friend in the other place Matt Fregon – the SRL kept getting the thumbs up. Across the east in seats that the Australian Labor Party has never held before, people were resoundingly voting for it, and we will deliver, just like we will deliver Metro Tunnel, opening next year – something I have had the chance to tour many times.

Just like the Metro Tunnel, the Suburban Rail Loop is going to improve Melbourne's public transport in a big way. The way we move around and across this great city, whether it is for work, study or leisure, will be easier and faster. Three transport super-hubs across the Suburban Rail Loop will greatly improve how Melburnians move around Melbourne and even how Victorians move around Victoria. These hubs are set to be located at Sunshine, Broadmeadows and Clayton, and there are additional connections to the existing network at the following stations: Cheltenham, Glen Waverley, Box Hill, Heidelberg, Reservoir, Fawkner and Werribee. This expansion allows for more flexible travel across the city. Gone will be the days of having to go all the way into Flinders Street station and then come back out. More direct connections will mean faster travel and less crowded trains.

Overall the Suburban Rail Loop and its hub system will do great things for the state of Victoria – hubs that will be centres for commerce; hubs that will help Victorians travel for work, study or play. Those opposite want these stopped. Further, these super-hubs mean that the Suburban Rail Loop will intersect with three outer-metro stations that service V/Line, supporting regional Victorians. This means travelling to regional Victoria will be easier regardless of where you live in Melbourne. It also means that regional Victorians coming into Melbourne can take a much more direct route to their metropolitan destinations, meaning faster, smoother travel.

Just like the changes that we will make to inner-city travel following the Suburban Rail Loop, V/Line passengers will have the option to avoid Southern Cross station for direct travel, with less congested interchange stations. We on this side of the chamber believe in supporting and improving V/Line. That is why the Suburban Rail Loop has been designed to benefit V/Line passengers as well as Metro Trains passengers. The Allan Labor government's track record on support for V/Line services and its patrons is consistent across the board. The perfect example is the capping of V/Line tickets at the same price as metropolitan tickets. This motion is full of politics and gestures. It is better suited to the federal Parliament than this place.

This motion is the opposition saying that they want the Allan Labor government to be like the Liberals and ignore public transport. Instead, we are delivering the most ambitious rail expansion that this state has ever seen. Along with the super-hubs, the Suburban Rail Loop project will introduce five new stations to the loop. There are two stations allocated in the east and the north and one station in the airport rail stretch of the loop. The big winners here are students, with those three stations located near some of the largest universities in Melbourne. Particularly in my neck of the woods, Monash students will benefit. Along with the Parkville station that was completed recently and a part of the Metro Tunnel Big Build project, the Allan Labor government is ensuring that students can get to their campuses faster and more easily.

SRL East Cheltenham to Box Hill has been consistently costed at \$30 billion to \$34.5 billion. The business and investment case noted that contributions to pay for the SRL would be sought from the state and federal governments from a value capture. The Liberal Party has multiple Parliamentary Budget Office references to the cost of the SRL East and North to build and operate for 50 years. This includes replacing the train fleet in 40 years time. This is not how infrastructure is costed. This has been used for decades, including the city loop. The SRL is going to generate tens of thousands of jobs. Approximately 24,000 Victorians will be employed in positions relating to the Suburban Rail Loop build. This estimate just includes those who have been employed directly by the Victorian government for Suburban Rail Loop related roles. Eight thousand of these jobs will be in the east. Among these job opportunities 10 per cent, or 800 of them, will be available for trainees, apprentices and cadets.

The SRL graduate program offers postgraduate students the opportunity to have hands-on experience. The graduate program offers a range of roles that participants will be able to join in to grow and hone their professional skills alongside experts. With the program lasting two years, participants will be able to participate in a broad range of fields to develop under the tutelage of the industry professionals. The Allan Labor government has introduced the SRL graduate program and set aside 10 per cent of jobs for trainees to ensure that we are continuing to train professionals and planning for the future of employment.

The number of jobs expected to be created in the Suburban Rail Loop areas from Cheltenham to Melbourne Airport is nearly 550,000 by 2050. These jobs will be close to train stations, making the commute easier and making the workday better. The Allan Labor government is about jobs and job creation. For every 100 jobs on the Big Build another 200 are estimated to be supported through the supply chain. At the peak of the construction about 50,000 direct and indirect jobs are supported, including more than 277 million hours worked across the Big Build to date.

We know that Melbourne is growing and this is needed. It is growing faster than any other city in Australia. That is part of why the Suburban Rail Loop is so important, yet the Liberals would like to stop that progress. Victorians know that only an Allan Labor government will deliver big projects like the Big Build. This includes the Suburban Rail Loop, which will reshape our city as it grows in the decades ahead. The impacts will extend beyond transportation, with very exciting implications for innovative hub planning.

As we know in this chamber, housing is a major priority for the Allan Labor government. We need to build better transport to our communities to unlock the value of living in the suburbs, and we need to build more homes in activity centres right around Melbourne. I know this firsthand. One of the first of

the 10 activity centres is based in my community of Hawthorn at Camberwell Junction, and I was pleased to recently chair a meeting of the community consultative committee on how this will shape my community. That means more homes and better transport links, and part of this wider plan is the SRL, because only the Allan Labor government has a plan. Only this side of the chamber has a plan for Victoria.

It was this very government that delivered the housing statement last year, and this government is delivering 800,000 homes across Victoria. The Allan Labor government is using the opportunity that the new Suburban Rail Loop East precincts offer to deliver even more housing to Victorians. By building 70,000 homes near Suburban Rail Loop precincts the Allan Labor government is ensuring that all Victorians can live close to where they work, close to where they study and close to where they call home. There is no alternative. If we cannot build this, in 50 years the seams will be breaking. Just because we did not build it 50 years ago is no reason not to build it now. It would be vandalism to our future generations.

This motion glosses over the fact that the federal Labor government delivered \$2.2 billion to Victoria for the Suburban Rail Loop. Even Albo said it: he could not think of a more exciting infrastructure project in the entire country. That is because Labor governments have big visions. We listen to the people, like how they voted twice in support of a government that will deliver the Suburban Rail Loop. The web of benefits this project offers Victoria is something that should not be played down.

To end today, think about what cancelling the SRL would mean: 4000 workers will be sacked, 24,000 jobs will be cancelled, thousands of Victorians will find it harder to afford a home that they can reach and the vote of the Victorian people will be ignored. We will not be doing that.

**Gaëlle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (15:23): I am pleased to speak on this motion put forward by my colleague Mr Mulholland about the Suburban Rail Loop. I must admit I was absolutely staggered that the state government are still tunnelling ahead with this proposal when it is clear they have no idea how to fund it. Mr John Berger just said this government, and I quote, 'has a plan'. Well, the only plan this government has is a marketing plan, because you announce projects and you cannot deliver them.

The state government should consider the budget impact of this major project in the light of Victoria's rapidly growing debt. After a decade of financial mismanagement under Labor, Victoria's net debt has risen from \$21.8 billion and is set to reach \$187.8 billion by 2027–28. That is not too far away. We have the highest debt of any state in Australia – more than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined. Due to Labor's financial mismanagement over the last decade we are currently paying over \$15 million every single day in interest. This next financial year it is going to jump to \$18 million a day and close to \$26 million every day by 2027–28. The Treasurer referred to a disciplined budget, but this is far from that. Labor has no plan to repay the debt. Victoria's annual interest bill is set to reach \$9.7 billion by 2027–28. That is close to 9 per cent of the government's total revenue spent paying interest on our state debt instead of going towards vital services.

When you consider the Suburban Rail Loop, I understand the business case for this major project was developed through the Premier's office and announced before the 2018 election. The SRL will be the biggest infrastructure project in the state's history without a proper business case. It would certainly be worth reviewing the government's project costings for the Suburban Rail Loop, which are well under the costs projected by the Parliamentary Budget Office. In her contribution to this debate Sonja Terpstra questioned the figures that we have been quoting, but I have looked them up again. The Parliamentary Budget Office has costed stages 1 and 2 of the project at \$216 billion. It is there in the report, page 1. She will not need to go far to have a look, but it is very clear from the graph that this is a huge amount of funding.

I would certainly like to know what consultation the government did with key stakeholders about the merits of this project, like Infrastructure Victoria, the Department of Transport and Planning and Infrastructure Australia. It is a big idea that Labor has sprung before the state election, as I mentioned,



in 2018 and again in 2022, but it would be very interesting to know when this major project was considered and approved by state cabinet. I would also like to know how the project will be funded, considering the limited funding committed by the federal government during the federal election campaign – as has been mentioned, \$2.2 billion – and that no further funding was allocated in the recent federal budget.

I would also like the government to consider the impact of the 8000 employees required to work on the project, the demand for workers during the current housing crisis when the building industry is already under pressure and the inflationary pressures of this major project. This budget has seen reduced funding for the regions, a lack of funding for regional roads, school upgrades delayed, the free kinder program and early learning centres deferred, hospital upgrades deferred and so much more. I am just scratching my head. \$207 million has been cut from public health on top of millions cut from dental services, aged care, ambulance services, health workforce training and maternal and child health. Funding for the CFA and SES is also inadequate. The majority are volunteers; they are the backbone of our local communities and they deserve better.

I was also stunned to see a 75 per cent funding cut to the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance. Cancer affects so many families right across Victoria, including mine. Why has the Premier signed contracts to progress the Suburban Rail Loop, which improves public transport in suburbs that already have public transport, when we have growing suburbs without proper public transport? Labor continues to raise taxes because their priorities are all wrong and they keep wasting money on projects like the Suburban Rail Loop.

**John Berger:** What are your priorities?

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Because Labor cannot manage money, Victorians now pay the highest taxes in Australia. I will tell you, Mr Berger, what some of my priorities are, because they certainly are not this government's priorities.

My priority is representing regional Victoria, which has been neglected for far too long by this government. Twenty-five per cent of the population lives in regional Victoria, yet in the recent state budget, Mr Berger, we got just 2 per cent of government infrastructure expenditure under Labor. Regional Victorians will receive just \$2 billion out of a \$98 billion infrastructure spend. A priority I have is seeing a much fairer share of funding right across regional Victoria.

We have, for example, the Yarrowonga bridge. It is 100 years old this year. Trucks are so big now that they cannot fit together when going across that bridge. That is the kind of infrastructure we want to see in regional Victoria. The Kilmore bypass – trucks go straight through the town. A bypass is what we want to see. It is the same in Shepparton. V/Line you referred to. I tried to catch a train home from Parliament last sitting week. The train in front broke down so an hour into the trip I had to turn around and travel an hour back. I am flabbergasted that we continue with the Suburban Rail Loop when we cannot even get our own current V/Line system working properly. Even at Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings the government failed to justify the massive gap in funding between metropolitan and regional areas that we have seen in this budget. Regional areas need investment. If we want Victoria to prosper, we have to stop having a city-heavy focus and focus on governing for the whole of the state. Labor win elections with big promises, but they fail to deliver what they promise. Sonja Terpstra in this debate said, 'Oh, people voted for it.'

**A member** interjected.

**Gaëlle BROAD:** Twice, yes. But they did not know the details, because you have not been forthcoming or transparent at all. We have seen time and time again that this government fails to do their homework. They cannot manage money, and they cannot manage projects. It is time to stop tunnelling ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop. After 10 years of Labor in government, our state cannot afford it. It is 130 weeks until the next state election, and I can tell you it cannot come soon enough.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:31): I rise today to speak on Mr Mulholland's efforts to secure the re-election of Paul Hamer and John Mullahy, otherwise known as yet another motion by the Liberal Party attacking the Suburban Rail Loop. As we know and as I have shared many, many times in this place, the Suburban Rail Loop is a transformational project. It is going to be an essential project for our growing city. I have spoken many, many times in this place about the benefits, in particular for my constituents in the south-east. If you are in Cranbourne, if you are in Carrum, if you are in Cardinia Road – just the Cs alone – going into whether it is to Monash Uni, to Deakin Uni, to job opportunities in Box Hill, Glen Waverley, Cheltenham, and of course those agglomeration effects that we are going to see from this project, this is a project that does not just benefit the individual suburbs it will be stopping along, it will benefit entire swathes of Victoria, including regional Victoria – with Gippsland as well – just from SRL East alone and of course from the housing build as well that we will see as part of this project.

I normally do love getting up to counterbat some of Mr Mulholland's arguments. I will make the point that it is a bit strange to be coming here today to be suggesting that the federal government is somehow walking away from this project, that they are not interested in investing in it, never mind the fact that they have already invested \$2.2 billion in this project. You do not invest \$2.2 billion or anything close to that figure if you do not believe in the project. In fact to pick up on the rounding error from Mr Mulholland, he did put the correct \$2.2 billion figure in the motion, but he kept referring to it as just \$2 billion. Please do not sit too close to Mr Davis, Mr Mulholland: we do not want you to be falling into his bad financial habits as well. We want you to be on top of things. Even just that rounding error alone, that \$200 million, is a significant investment that shows the value of this project to the federal government. The fact that their investment is 11 times that should show that very clearly as well. As previous colleagues on this side of the chamber have outlined – and I believe to a point, Mrs Broad, you also intimated that you would accept as well – this is a project that the people of Victoria have voted for at two consecutive elections.

I would actually like to pick up on a couple of points that Mr Welch made in his contribution, firstly in regard to housing. This is a government that is actually – I do not know what your plan is, Mr Welch – determined to address the housing situation that we have in this state head-on. We do that by building the housing that our growing state needs. We need to be investing in these houses. That is why we have a commitment to build 800,000 homes over the 10-year period, and the SRL precincts are going to be a very big, very important part of that. It makes sense to concentrate responsible medium-density housing in and around those transport nodes, where people will be less reliant on cars. It is better for the environment, better for our urban design, better for the people living there themselves. So you might not like the idea of middle-growth housing, Mr Welch, but I can tell you what you are calling for – and I am sure Mr Mulholland will have something to say about that – is continued growth. We are investing in those growth suburbs, as I regularly enjoy discussing with Mr Mulholland in this place. I could rattle off all the new schools we are building just in the Berwick electorate alone, which completely surpass any built by their government in the entire state when they were last in office. I could easily go back into that argument. The other point I would say, Mr Welch: frankly, yes, we do need to have that housing built. If you think the solution to that is continuing to expand the outer suburbs until they have reached Traralgon or Bendigo, then I think the Victorian people have got something to tell you as well.

But the other point I would like to pull you up on, Mr Welch, is that you said that you lived in London at some point, and you said that we talk about – and yes, we do say it a bit because it is true – Melbourne's population being projected to grow to be the size of London by the 2050s and that a city like London has those orbital rail networks. You responded to that by saying the Circle line is hardly evidence of that, and that you lived in London and you used the Circle line. I actually agree with you. The Circle line is actually quite an inner-city line. It is probably a bigger version of the city loop – what we have here – with quite a few more stops, but apart from that it is that sort of sized area. Incidentally I am sure this Liberal Party would be opposing the city loop as well, just as we had some apparent academics in the 1960s – no doubt from the same ilk as those that Mr Mulholland has been

quoting from today – saying that this was a terrible project and we should not build the city loop. Never mind that. In fact, Mr Welch, I am surprised that you, having lived in London, are not aware of this, but there is in fact actually a specific orbital rail network called the London Overground. It serves well over 100 stations. It is a fully orbital network, and you said yourself that there are no orbital or cross-town railways in London. That is simply a fact. And the reason I can tell you that, Mr Welch, is I actually have this handy map here of the London Overground network, which actually shows a big circle.

With the permission of the house, I will now seek leave to table this document into *Hansard*.

**Leave refused.**

**Michael GALEA:** They do not want hear it. I am trying to assist the house today. I despair. I am in this place trying to correct the record. I am trying to help inform our friends Mr Mulholland and Mr Welch, but they do not want to see it. Mr Mulholland does not want to see it in *Hansard*. We had David Davis's lovely long-form presentation yesterday that they were all too keen to get in with the different lines of all the same colour. But obviously the Liberal Party do not want to see this, because they do not want to acknowledge the fact that big, successful cities like London, and very much like Melbourne is becoming, have successful orbital railway networks, just like the SRL.

You can say the technology is different; absolutely, it is different technology. But when people get on the trains, they care about getting point to point. What they can do in London on the overground is get point to point. And that is exactly what you will have in Melbourne as well. We have an opposition here that do not want to see that. They do not want to acknowledge the fact that the Victorian people have voted in two consecutive elections for this project, and they refuse to acknowledge that the future in this city is more people getting around by train and not less. This is another ridiculous motion put forward by the Liberal Party. I do not support this motion.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:38): Well, well, well, well, well, we have had a string of contributions from Labor MPs, so it is important to correct a few points. You will see with that side of the chamber repeated talking points over and over variously changed between them. One of the quotes they were actually using was a quote from the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, which said that he could not think of a more exciting infrastructure project going on in Australia, and they quoted Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The problem for them is he never said that comment as Prime Minister. He actually said that comment as opposition leader. I implore the members of the government, I implore the government backbenchers, to find a positive comment from Anthony Albanese as Prime Minister about the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL). And I bet you will not, because it was the Morrison government that said it did not stack up, that their experts had looked at it and they had advice it did not stack up. And it is basically Catherine King that is saying the same thing. We are waiting on a report from Infrastructure Australia. We are not going to get it.

**John Berger:** He has finished.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** No, I am absolutely not finished. He did not actually say that comment when he was Prime Minister. He has not said a single favourable thing. You will not hear a single favourable thing. You will definitely hear federal Labor ministers around town bagging out the decision to proceed with the SRL. You definitely will hear that. I am sure their federal colleagues are not happy with it. I know there are several members of cabinet that are not happy with it, who think that other infrastructure projects are missing out. I could not help but hear in the talking points as well that somehow Gippsland would benefit from the SRL. Well, the thing that the people of Gippsland are annoyed about is: no hospital. Where is their hospital? Where is the Pakenham hospital? Ms Shing cannot show her face down there because everyone wants their hospital. Mr McIntosh does not even venture that far. He would not dare venture that far.

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Mulholland was very eager to bring other speakers on this side to order on the question of relevance. If he cannot even fill 5 minutes talking about his own motion, there is probably something wrong, but I ask him to return to his own motion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur):** There is no point of order, Mr Galea.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I was talking about the references made to Gippsland, and I am summing up other contributions. It was also discussed about Box Hill and Glen Waverley and that they had given a massive endorsement. I do not believe the government revealed before that Box Hill would be going from 36 square metres of open space per person to 7 square metres of open space per person. I suspect the local member will be in for a drubbing at the next election for his deceitful actions towards his community. The member for Box Hill will be having a bigger election loss than he did in 2012 when he lost Griffin Ward, Banyule City Council, to my mother. It was good seeing him defeated at that election, and he will be defeated at the next election. He will be deleted – defeated and deleted at the next election.

In Glen Waverley as well, businesses are being destroyed. Their livelihoods are being destroyed. They are told they are going to have disruptions for 10 years. This is the contempt this Victorian government shows for businesses around the state, who they have taxed to high hell. They are saying, ‘You’re going to have 10 years of disruption.’ Many will never come back from that. They will never come back from that. That is the contempt they show for business.

The main point I want to make is: this project is robbing essential infrastructure projects from growth areas. The people of Greenvale will not be getting stage 2 of the Mickleham Road duplication because this government is proceeding with the SRL. The people of Wallan will not be getting electrification because they are proceeding with the SRL. The good people of Wyndham Vale and Melton will not be getting their train line electrified, despite being promised twice. They talk about having won two elections on the SRL. Well, technically you have won two elections in the west on the *Western Rail Plan*. Where is it? It is just going to be like the Melton hospital. You will put another fence around it before the next election – that is what you will do. You are robbing growth areas of essential infrastructure for a vanity project dreamed up in tax evasion city down the road in a locked room because of Jacinta Allan and Daniel Andrews proceeding with this stupid project.

#### **Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (14):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (17):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

#### **Government accountability**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (15:50): I move:

That this house:

- (1) affirms that the public have a right to know how their tax dollars are spent by the Victorian government, Victorian government departments and local government councils;
- (2) calls on the government to establish, as a matter of principle and practice, that disclosure of specific information about government-funded projects, programs and services be made publicly available, including:
  - (a) unredacted contracts, unless specific information can be objectively proven to necessitate redaction;

- (b) conflict of interest disclosures;
- (c) annual expenditure data;
- (d) annual performance reviews; and
- (e) statutes under which programs and services are authorised.

It is my pleasure and honour to put to the house today my motion, which essentially states that the public have a right to know how their tax dollars are spent – exactly. Just because Victorians vote a government in does not mean that there is a blanket mandate for it to do whatever it likes, however it likes, with taxpayer dollars. An election once every four years is not good enough. Democracy and accountability are owed to every single Victorian every single day. As the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner acknowledges, the interests of the government are distinct from those of the public.

We all know that Victoria is mired in debt due to financial mismanagement and poorly restrained corruption. The truth is Victorians are not even shocked anymore when we find out about corruption and misuse of our taxpayer dollars. We do not even raise an eyebrow when the next IBAC investigation reveals negligent and corrupt procurement processes involving unions, and we cannot even be bothered to roll our eyes when we hear that nobody in the government can recall how it all went wrong or who was responsible for the creeping assumptions that led them all innocently astray. We laugh so that we do not cry when we find out yet again that a quick tidy refund to taxpayers or a single-sentence apology will do for consequences because so-and-so does not even work there anymore, and they promise Victorians hand over heart that they will learn from all these very educational investigation reports.

But honestly, I am not even interested in simply complaining and scoring political points. I actually want solutions. So I want to put it to you all here today that we need to start being proactive and stop being reactive when it comes to ensuring our taxes are not wasted or corrupted. I am not even asking for anything radical. In fact the principles for public transparency under the Local Government Act 2020, which this government introduced, state that under the previous act certain matters were automatically considered confidential. This new act assumes instead that all matters must be public, except in very specific and limited circumstances, and the reason that is given is that openness, accountability and honesty are essential to build higher levels of accountability and trust amongst citizens and enable fully informed engagement in the democratic process. I could not have put it better myself.

Unfortunately, there is a paragraph allowing this principle of transparency to be overridden if it is deemed to be ‘contrary to the public interest’. Who decides what is in the public interest? Not the public, that is for sure. The government, government agencies and government employees decide. Of course little plebs and journalists can challenge them through the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner and VCAT, but even there we find that there is no objective definition of the public interest, just a list of possible considerations to work through when ruling on a case-by-case basis whether the public has a right to know.

Apparently Victorian government contract management disclosures only cover high-level details for contracts over \$100,000, and they are published within 60 days on the TendersVIC website. They include things like contract and subcontract numbers, titles, types, estimated value, start date, terms and categories, and disclosures for organisation supplier details include name and details of the contact person and ABN. Obviously trade secrets and genuinely confidential business information can be withheld from voluntary disclosure, but then again, there is that little term ‘and whatever else is deemed to be in the public interest’.

The first contract that we need to fix is the social contract. Victorians have faithfully paid their taxes, their local government rates, their parking fines and their levies. Small businesses and big businesses alike have faithfully paid the mental health levy and the payroll taxes and spent extra money to meet the ever-increasing red tape requirements of this government. For decade after decade, Victorians have

had to watch more and more of their hard-earned money go out of their own pockets into the government coffers. They have fulfilled their half of the social contract and the government claims to have fulfilled theirs, but we all know that it does not really feel like that to the struggling families out there, and there is not any easy way for them to tell. The fact is that it is not in the public interest that the burden of proof, time, effort and money is on them to show that they have a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. That burden should be shifted to the government and those who they enter into contracts with.

The Center for Global Development is a world-renowned authority advising countries both rich and poor on how to maximise development. Almost 10 years ago now they published a report on government contracts, and the main conclusion was that government contracts regarding the use of public property and finances should be published by default. They concluded that publishing government contracts has a number of potential benefits that justify its limited cost. These include improved design, tendering and price forecasting, increased quality and extent of competition, and improved monitoring of value for money and service delivery. Some of the actual examples from their research on the benefits of contract transparency included a 50 per cent increase in competition for government tenders in Slovakia, reduced variation and lower average prices in hospital supplies in Latin America, lower costs for social housing in France, the exposure of significant political party funding by sole-source contract winners in Georgia and civil society monitoring of a social development fund by a mining company in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Many countries have already advanced towards this way of running government, including the United Kingdom. Given the billions and billions of dollars spent by local government, state government and all of their departments on contracts, transparency reduces the risk of error, failure and corruption and ensures that our taxpayers are getting value for money, so I commend this motion to the house.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:57): I am really pleased, actually, to be able to make a contribution on Mrs Deeming's motion in relation to government transparency, because particularly in a week or a month where we have been dealing with budget bills and the appropriation bills it is important that the public does have confidence that they are able to find out how public money is spent. That is absolutely true. So I thought it was important to step through in a little bit of detail how the financial management arrangements currently work in the state of Victoria and how the Financial Management Act 1994 and the standing directions issued by this Treasurer underneath that act operate to put a great deal of the information that Mrs Deeming's motion, in substance, seeks to have on the public domain and the extent to which a lot of that information is already available publicly on our websites for everyone to look at at their leisure and in a great deal of detail.

I think the first place to start is the legislation. A law of this state passed by this Parliament – the Financial Management Act 1994 – sets out in quite a lot of detail the level of public reporting and accountability that is required from government departments and agencies about the reporting on how public money is spent and the purposes for which that is spent, and agency by agency, department by department, what the financial reporting standards are so that public money is able to be accounted for and that everyone, including members of Parliament but also members of the public, are able to go through in great detail and see those.

Sitting under the Financial Management Act 1994 are a range of standing directions that are issued under the Financial Management Act, and in a variety of areas – and I will not have time here to go through all of them, but I am always willing to do that – they set out a range of matters under which departments and agencies are supposed to report, and every year those departments report back to the Department of Treasury and Finance, and senior managers in those departments have to attest that they are complying with those standards. At the end of all of that process there is a compliance report prepared by the Department of Treasury and Finance, which is publicly available, to detail exactly how well government departments are accounting for the funds they have been provided with. To

quote from the 2021–22 report on compliance with the standing directions under the Financial Management Act 1994, the Department of Treasury and Finance said:

Overall there was another reduction in the number of departments and agencies reporting material compliance deficiencies; this trend is in line with the expectation that departments and agencies focus on rectifying ... material issues.

We are seeing a comprehensive reporting framework and reporting on the reporting framework which demonstrates that there is a reduction year on year in the number of deficiencies against those standards. What are some of those standards? I will go to probably the most important one, which is financial reporting direction 22. These are the standard disclosures that are required to be made by departments and agencies in their report of operations. They go to things like appropriate financial standards and reporting, disclosure of contracts, the amount of money spent under those contracts, how they have been acquitted and the purposes for which those contracts have been let, including who they have been let to. For example, if someone was interested in finding out what contracts, say, the Department of Health, to take one example, had entered into above a certain value threshold – because you cannot report every contract amount; I think it is a \$10,000 value threshold that gets reported – they could go to the Department of Health’s annual report, which details in aggregate that amount of spending. That annual report will direct you to the department’s website, so the health department’s website – I will not read out the URL, but you can go and find it – where there is a list, in machine-readable format, of the number of consultancies, for example, that the department has entered into in the 2022–23 financial year.

Why that is important is that if you go there, you can not only see detail on the amount of the contract but who it has been contracted to, the purposes for which the contract was entered into, the sum total of the contract and how much of that spending has been made to date. You can see progress under each of these contracts in terms of how much expenditure been made to date, how much is left to go and the purposes for which it is there. For example, you can go right now to the Department of Health’s website and find all that information, and you can do that for all of the other government departments and agencies that are covered by the standing directions issued under the Financial Management Act.

A great deal of the sort of information that Mrs Deeming is seeking in relation to the expenditure of public money is already publicly available. It is on departmental websites, because this government believes in effective government and it believes in transparent government. It has consistently throughout its tenure been publishing this sort of material not only in the annual reports but also in things like machine-readable format so that it can be more easily analysed by those people who wish to do so. They are not just getting hard copies of reports, they can actually get a computer file already loaded up so they can plug it into an Excel spreadsheet and do the kind of analysis which is readily available.

But of course if we are interested in what contracts there are – not only what expenditure has been made but also what contracts there are – we do have a whole of Victorian government procurement function sitting in the newly formed Department of Government Services, which is a new agency created since the last election, designed to bring a whole range of coordination and operation of government services functions into the same place and which has responsibility, amongst other things, for whole of Victorian government procurement. Part of the procurement framework which is overseen by the department are the state purchasing contracts, which provide a framework by which government departments are required to do things like find value for money in the contracting that they undertake. We use publicly available, on the Buying for Victoria website, contract and tender portals so that relevant suppliers can see what contracts are out to tender. And that information will include things like the services and suppliers that are covered in the contract, so you could right now log onto this website and find out where we buy all our pens and paper from – that level of detail. Government stationery is just one example of the things that are covered by the state purchasing contract, right through to legal services, right through to professional services, right through to

information technology services and a whole range of other purchasing services which are publicly available on the internet right now on the Buying for Victoria website.

One of the other things which we do – again, an innovation of this government to be more transparent and accountable with the expenditure of public money – is the government’s IT dashboard, which lists all of the government information technology projects, their purpose, how much their contracting is and progress against meeting the milestones under those projects and under that contract. Again, it is updated on a regular basis and made publicly available so that people understand exactly where the government is spending its money. You can go through and search by portfolio or search by contract and see how many of them are on track or how many of them are not on track.

There are a range of other things that the government is doing to ensure transparency with the expenditure of public money. One of the critical ones is the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process that this Parliament goes through. A lot of this information is in the public domain. A lot of this information is already on government websites. A lot of this information is already available in machine-readable and accessible forms so that every Victorian, should they desire, can sit down and find out where public money is being spent right now. This government believes in transparency and accountability and is demonstrating it by the way it runs this government.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:07): I am very delighted to speak on Mrs Deeming’s motion on financial transparency. This is a pretty straightforward motion that the Liberals and Nationals will be supporting because Victorians do have a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent by the Victorian government, Victorian government departments and local councils. I think it raises really good points about unredacted documents but also conflict-of-interest disclosures, annual expenditure data, annual performance reviews and statutes under which programs and services are authorised. It goes to the heart of transparency in our state. The government spends hard-earned money from Victorian taxpayers, so it is of the utmost importance that Victorians know how this money is actually being spent. Not only does this financial transparency improve governance, but it is the bedrock of a healthy and functioning democracy and fosters trust. The government is one of the least transparent governments we have ever seen.

We see it in freedom-of-information laws, where Victoria has more requests each year than even Commonwealth agencies, more than double WA, with departments and agencies taking longer and longer to release documents and fewer requests released in full. Often documents are redacted for the most trivial reasons, like it would cause unnecessary public debate. They find every excuse under the sun. One example: Victoria Police have a standard 36-week response time, as advised, in response to any FOI requests no matter how narrow the scope.

We have had some ridiculous cases with FOI requests. You have simple requests. I sent one in asking for legal costs for the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority and what they were spending on high-end lawyers to shake down young families who had lost all of their deposits and as a result going to VCAT would actually cost them more than what they were seeking in return. So I thought it appropriate to ask what that would cost – because it is a very important point. It was denied by the VMIA. Then I went to the information commissioner, and the information commissioner said, ‘Actually several other government departments have given up legal costs, so we think this is appropriate.’ VMIA then looks back into and reopens the request, only to again deny it. Under this government our freedom-of-information laws continue to fail. Many people have to travel all the way to VCAT to fight this government for documents. I know my colleague Mr Davis is a frequent flyer there, fighting this government to release documents that should be public and open to the Victorian community but are not. Dozens of FOI documents have been refused in full and scores refused in part since January 2024.

This government requires more accountability. It has a shameful record. It is a government that recently tried to kill the Public Records Advisory Council, which plays an important role in keeping government documents for places like the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the



Victorian Auditor-General's Office and Parliament. It wanted to get rid of that. It wanted to abolish that completely. Were it not for the opposition, that would have happened. It is the government run by those opposite – whose former leader, and we should not forget this, treats reports like those by the Ombudsman as educational. 'Educational' is the way he views things. It is the government that set aside a \$75.7 billion slush fund on the budget, which RMIT Emeritus Professor David Hayward said makes the budget position look 'very rubbery' and about which respected economist Saul Eslake said, 'Anything that is hidden in there is a transparency issue.' Of course it is. You know, when a project is not yet announced, it is a massive transparency issue. We ought to know the full facts behind the creation of the Suburban Rail Loop, which was dreamt up inside PwC without a single expert supporting it. These are the kinds of things we need to get to the bottom of.

When we have \$40 billion of blowouts, surely it gets to, like, one or two and you get in a room and think, 'What's going to go on here?' Obviously those opposite have never worked a day in business in their life, because if you are in a business and you are responsible for that amount of money in blowouts, you would not be keeping your job; your board would be tapping you on the shoulder, but also the board would probably have to go as well for overseeing it. And yet somehow Jacinta Allan fell upwards into the premiership even though there has been that amount of blowouts.

But it is also about getting to the bottom of those blowouts. Why did they occur? Why do they keep occurring? Can we look at the cost-plus scenario? Can we look at what is happening on our construction sites? Can we look at the fact that you have alleged standover tactics from the CFMEU going on on several government sites, including the Suburban Rail Loop and the Mickleham Road project, which has been covered to a great extent by the *Australian Financial Review*, where they kicked off a whole bunch of Indigenous labour hire firms and replaced them with a new firm, a Mick Gatto linked Indigenous firm, on the upgrade. We see the Premier was actually warned about CFMEU coercion of Indigenous firms. But what was the Premier's response – what was the then minister's response? Her response was to send it to the Australian Building and Construction Commission, which had had all its funding removed and whose abolition was pending. That was the Premier's response – outrageous.

So we need some accountability mechanism as well. I know the Liberals and Nationals have announced an intention to bring back the construction code that was abolished by those opposite, and include a new body, construction enforcement Victoria, so that we can actually get to the bottom of these cost blowouts. We want to build infrastructure – we want to build a lot of infrastructure – but we do not want cost blowouts added in, as seems to be happening with this government because they cannot say no to the union bosses. As we know, because Jacinta Allan was warned, they turned a blind eye when they were warned by experts within the public service that there was corruption going on, that there were standover tactics going on. They turned a blind eye because they cannot stand up to the CFMEU. The Andrews government was warned about illegal CFMEU activity:

Victorian Deputy Premier Jacinta Allan was warned about "illegal" CFMEU coercion of Indigenous firms on the state's infrastructure projects last year, sparking alerts across political offices.

Emails released under freedom of information laws show a state infrastructure executive briefed Ms Allan about an unnamed Indigenous labour hire firm that the CFMEU allegedly kicked off nine government projects, including the state's signature ... Suburban Rail Loop.

It is just ridiculous. I know the Victorian Indigenous business chamber raised the issue and said the government did nothing about it. They referred it to the Australian Building and Construction Commission, which lost all funding and is now abolished. You cannot have situations like this. The Victorian government need to do better. We see issues and we know their opinion on grey corruption, they think it is not a thing. Here we go:

Senior staff in Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews's government interfered and pressured public servants to ensure lucrative contracts were awarded to a key Labor Party ally without competitive tender, the state's anti-corruption watchdog has found.

The Health Workers Union was awarded a \$1.2 million contract on the eve of the 2018 election ...

and later were found to be ‘not equipped’ for that particular program. You have a situation where public servants are getting pressured by probably 22-year-old pimply-faced staffers in the Premier’s office – just ridiculous. So I support this motion. It is a good motion.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:17): I rise today to speak against the motion before us from Mrs Deeming. Let me just say this government provides effective and transparent processes in all that it does, which is why we have created the Department of Government Services, which brought together a range of the different functions across government to better support the coordination and general operation of government services. We did this with effectiveness and transparency at the forefront. For the whole of the Victorian government’s procurement function, which manages over 35 state purchasing contracts – and that is quite a lot when you are thinking across the broad depth of the procurement of our state – all of these 35 state purchasing contracts are available on the Buying for Victoria website. These are publicly available to anyone with an internet connection to go and have a browse and see what this government is doing and the services and suppliers that are covered under the contract, and that is the 35 state purchasing contracts. All this information is transparent, it is clear and it is available. If you want to see where the government gets its pens and paper, you can do that just by clicking online to the Buying for Victoria website.

We understand that transparent procurement information fosters improved purchasing practices and results in significant savings for government buyers, who can capitalise on the collective purchasing power of the entire Victorian government. To support this, our government is continually enhancing the Buying for Victoria platform, as I mentioned. This platform simplifies the processes of doing business with the government and offers a centralised hub for all procurement information, benefiting both the suppliers and the buyers. By streamlining the access to procurement data, the platform aims to promote fairness, efficiency and economic opportunity within the state’s procurement landscape. Buying for Victoria includes details on all active tenders and recently awarded contracts, so you can see exactly what government is purchasing from whom, and this is clear and effectively the most important of the transparent processes.

Can I also make mention that this is how this government is using its buying power to deliver really social and sustainable outcomes for all Victorians. We have established a whole-of-government approach to social procurement, which is an Australian first, through the social procurement framework – or SPF as it is known – which ensures that all government procurement activities are aligned to social procurement outcomes. This means that businesses who use social and disability enterprises or Aboriginal businesses in their tenders for government contracts have a competitive edge, giving more opportunities to often-overlooked sections of our community. The Allan Labor government knows the importance of creating jobs for those facing barriers to employment, including First Nations people and businesses, long-term jobseekers, at-risk women, victims and survivors of family violence, people with a disability and even younger Victorians.

I am also very proud to report that the 2024–25 budget continues our government’s investment in and commitment to providing funding to the Kinaway Aboriginal chamber of commerce and social traders to support businesses and to work with the departments to promote procurement of Aboriginal enterprises and Victorian Aboriginal businesses. In fact I had the good fortune on Monday evening of heading along to the Melbourne Museum to see an exhibition of First Nations organisations in the fashion industry. As many would know, Victoria has quite a thriving fashion industry. With the support of Kinaway as the Aboriginal chamber of commerce we were able to see some Victorian-based fashion businesses – of course those that are creating jobs here, those organisations that are manufacturing their clothing here. They are now on the runways of the most lucrative fashion shows in the world. They have come from very humble beginnings, with incredible support from the Allan Labor government for those businesses and those brands currently being showcased at the Melbourne Museum. I encourage you all to get along there and see that exhibition.

There are other organisations that I am very proud to hear have done some incredible, incredible work, including some in the building and construction industry but also right across the field. Only last week,

on Saturday, I was with some business leaders who were for the first time looking at traditional owner engagement in the mining and resource industry here in Victoria. As is known and has been discussed, there are enormous opportunities here in Victoria, and some of the traditional owners are getting onboard with that, including the Dja Dja Wurrung and their goldmining operations. Congratulations to them, and I look forward to seeing those businesses go from strength to strength.

The government's procurement processes have never been stronger or more transparent. Any information that someone would want to know is online because of the Allan Labor government's commitment to good governance. It is in fact good for business and good for Victorians.

Another example that comes to mind, one that I am less across, is IT procurement. I do know how enormously challenging that can be. This government is showing transparency in the way it does business in the IT world with the creation of the IT dashboard, which is where every government department reports to the Department of Government Services on all the IT projects – those that are over \$1 million – and it shows information on the progress and the costings. Look, it is a really simple and practical function that is part of our commitment to transparency. I encourage you all to have a look at that dashboard if that is of interest to you. You can go on to the dashboard, search by the department, by the area, and if you are wondering if that is about health, IT infrastructure or transport, it does not matter – you can go and select your category of IT projects online. For each project you can see the project status, the projected costs and whether or not they are off track, reported details as to why if that is indeed the case and what is being done to address the issue.

This is a central government database with transparency baked into the design so that the public, including those in this place, can access it. The Department of Government Services has designed the dashboard in a user-centred way so that all Victorians can search and track projects that are of interest. The dashboard is updated regularly so that anyone who wants an update can get one. I am very proud to report the latest statistics on that dashboard, which says that there were a total of 308 projects reported in the last quarter. The majority – 74 per cent in this case – are on track. We are committed to providing transparent information, and that is why we established and are continuing to maintain the dashboard, so that anyone can see what the government is doing, where we are spending our money, how much progress we are making and of course which departments are doing that. That, particularly going back to the IT dashboard, is for those projects over \$1 million.

Transparency is something that is key to this government's operation. Our procurement and contractual processes are an ideal example of how the Allan Labor government is committed to ethical, sustainable and socially responsible procurement, and we expect the same high standards of any business that supplies services and goods to the government. That is why we have implemented a supplier code of conduct which includes the minimum ethical standards we expect from suppliers, because ensuring that this government only does business with companies that have the best interests of the government and Victorians in mind is something that we strive for.

I have got the good fortune of having a history with the anti-slavery taskforce, which I know is doing some incredible work to make sure that government procurement includes products that are free from the slavery trade. I am looking forward to continuing to follow that work and seeing how we can strengthen that here in this state. This work I am talking about, the supplier code of conduct, includes standards in ethics and conduct, conflicts of interest, gifts, benefits and of course hospitality. It also looks at corporate governance. It looks at labour rights, human rights, health and safety and environmental management. Within that, as I said, is the commitment around anti-slavery.

There are things that all suppliers who contact with government must do, like declare any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest and that they will avoid financial, business or other relationships that may compromise the performance of their duties or present a conflict of interest. The state expects all existing and new suppliers to commit to the code, and conflicts of interest are identified during the procurement process. This maintains transparency in all things that the government does.

This motion is really doing nothing more than asking for documents and information that is already available for anyone, including those within this place, to access whenever and wherever they wish to. Restating already public information in this place is a waste of everybody's time, frankly, and that is why I will not be supporting the motion before us.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:27): I rise to speak to motion 435, which is really looking at government accountability, transparency and scrutiny. The motion points out:

That this house:

- (1) affirms that the public have a right to know how their tax dollars are spent by the Victorian government, Victorian government departments and local government councils ...

And it calls on the government to establish a number of things in principle and practice around disclosure and public information to be made available and looks at contracts and conflict of interest disclosures and the like.

There is a lot to say on this matter with this Labor government – under this current leadership but also under the former leadership of Daniel Andrews. I was just listening to Ms Watt, some of the contribution she was making, and she mentioned Kinaway, which is the Victorian Indigenous business chamber, which raised an issue around illegal CFMEU activity and the government did not do anything about those allegations. Instead it referred it on to what was soon to be scrapped – a body that they were going to scrap. So Ms Watt referred to this Indigenous outfit. When they raised concerns the government said, 'Go over there to the ABCC to have it checked out.' It was a body that they were scrapping. That is what we get with this government. It is very dubious, how they actually follow through. What they say is one thing, but what they do is completely the opposite.

We know there have been huge issues around corruption under Labor. We have seen it rife. It is throughout a number of industries, and there have been many people that have spoken out. A former IBAC commissioner has talked about the issues and the Ombudsman. The grey corruption has permeated throughout many agencies and large parts of government administration. The previous government under Daniel Andrews was rotten to the core. You heard me say that a number of times, and it was. We have still got Operation Richmond, which is the United Firefighters Union being investigated by IBAC. That report still has not been released because of where it is at in the Supreme Court, and the release being fought off. Why? If there is nothing to hide, why are they fighting having that report released? This is a huge issue, and it involves – I have no doubt when that report finally comes out – issues with the UFU and members of the Labor Party, very senior members of the Labor Party. I think that will expose what everyone basically knows – that this corruption and the ongoing issue around decency and transparency are just things that do not resonate with the former Andrews government but now the Allan government, because their issues are still going on. The corruption is still there within the building industry, and as I said, that building commission was abolished. Things were referred off to it, but they are abolishing that very body. It just demonstrates how serious they are about stamping out corruption.

An article just a few weeks ago by Matt Johnston and Carly Douglas talks about the union saying allegations 'stink worse than a bag of prawns in the sun', a very substantive allegation by those union members that are talking about what is going on, and I commend them for talking about what is actually happening. They talk about dodgy deals, standover tactics and alleged corruption on Victoria's Big Build sites that have been or will be referred to IBAC:

The Australian Workers' Union –

that is the union that says this –

says the allegations "stink worse than a bag of prawns in the sun" and are costing taxpayers "tens of millions of dollars".

They are right. We know; we have seen it. Look at Operation Daintree. Look at all these issues around what has happened with IBAC, how the former Premier himself was involved. He had his fingers in

every pie, up to his neck in this. Seriously, that has left a nasty waft around the state in terms of the allegations.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, yes.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** It is; it is corrupt. The Allan government is corrupt. How many times was the Labor government before IBAC? At least four times that we know about, Mr McIntosh. You were not here. Now you are.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, it stinks, and the AWU is right – the standover tactics, the corruption and the dodgy deals done on the Big Build, that is your Labor mates in the union saying it. What did they say? It stinks worse than a bag of prawns in the sun. That is what the union is saying about the Big Build dodgy deals that are going on, the standover tactics and the corruption. These are deals that were signed on by the current Premier. She was the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and she is responsible for a lot of the dodgy deals and allowing them to permeate in the way they have, because there has been no pulling back of what has gone on. This is why we have got billions of dollars in cost blowouts and projects running out of control. People come to us and talk about it. I have had people that have come to me and talked about the prostitution that has gone on, the drug deals that have gone on on these Big Build sites –

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER:** You hold your head in your hands. I am telling you, people have come to me and have said what has gone on in these works with some of these people that are running it. Prostitution –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, it is happening. That is what whistleblowers are saying, and I am using privilege to call it out. You guys will not. You are too gutless. You are covering it up, and you are allowing –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** You are allowing –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Not members here. I am talking about what is happening in the Big Build.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** No, that is your inference, Ms Shing. I am saying that the drug deals –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I have got no idea what you are talking about, no idea. What I am talking about is the dodgy deals, the drug deals and the prostitution that have gone on in the Big Build sites. I do not know what you are talking about. What I am talking about is the corruption that is occurring in the Big Build, and the AWU –

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER:** People sleeping in their cars to do double shifts, the ghost shifting that was going on – all of this stuff has cost the taxpayer so much money, and your government has done

nothing to clean it up. You have turned a blind eye, and it is the current Premier, who is a former minister, who allowed all this to occur under her watch. She was the minister when this corruption and the blowouts and the mismanagement went on. It has been reported in papers what has gone on.

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, I am sure IBAC is probably having a look. I am sure IBAC is probably having a good look at what is going on in the Big Build, and so they should.

This government, the Labor government, has overseen corruption and a dismantling of decency in government. There has been no oversight. As I said, a government being in IBAC four times – four times in IBAC, this government – and where is Operation Richmond? Still in the courts. We need to see that. The conflict, the public disclosures and all of these issues that have been raised in this motion, this government is responsible for. There are dodgy deals going on that they have turned a blind eye to. They have not pulled up what has gone on. They have abolished the watchdog that will oversee it. As I said, they were so slow to act, and Daniel Andrews had his fingers all into it – he is up to his neck in some of these decisions around why this corruption was allowed to go on. He did not pull it up, and no-one in the current government has either, and it is the Victorian taxpayers that are paying the price for that in huge budget blowouts, mismanagement and the billions of dollars of waste. Labor members over on the other side, for anyone who is watching this, are very curious – they seem not to understand that having government be accountable and responsible is absolutely critical. This government – (*Time expired*)

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:37): I do not really know where to start after that tirade. That was quite some contribution, so I will gather my thoughts. To be clear, to start, I rise to oppose this motion, and I will go through a number of measures that the government put in place for transparency and accountability. I do want to start off by addressing some of the wild, wild claims coming from the other side. I am proud to be part of a government that is here to deliver a better quality of life for Victorians, to ensure that all Victorians enjoy a better quality of life than those that came before, and that is exactly what this side gets up and gets on with every single day. It is about ensuring there are jobs, and we see it in record levels of employment. I will talk later about the diversity of our workforce and getting a diverse range of people into the workforce, whether that is women, whether that is people with disabilities or whether it is First Nations people, and making sure that the workforce is paid well so when they finish a day's work and when they get their pay cheque, they have got the funds to make sure they can buy or rent a house, to make sure that they can contribute, whether that is supporting a family, supporting extended family or being able to support their lives in a way that contributes to the local community and contributes to our economy. We know when people are paid well, and we on this side believe in that – there may be others who want to demonise workers, who hate the idea of workers being paid well. There is this sort of Thatcher-esque, Reaganesque, trickle-down economics sort of mentality on that side out of student university politics.

There is this hatred for workers, this ideological, pathological hatred for workers by those opposite. This side is based in community. It is based in people being able to go to work safely, come home safely with a good pay cheque at the end of the week, support their loved ones and contribute to our community. It is ensuring that the health services are there, that there is a quality health service infrastructure, that there are the workers within it and that we have an education system – a world-leading education system. We can go through all the investments we are making in new schools, all the investments that we are making in upgrades to schools, supporting our teachers and making sure that our kids go into education. When they come out, if they want going into training and skills for the abundant number of jobs that are in this state, they are getting trained up in a quality TAFE system that again has the investment in infrastructure and the investment in our teachers. For those that want to go to university, there is a strong economy for them to get employed in right here in Victoria. For many of those people that go through those training or education pathways, do you know what they find? They find jobs, because we are investing in infrastructure, incredible levels of infrastructure that will set us up for generations to come.

Mr Mulholland was making assertions earlier in a previous speech, or maybe it was in this debate. I do not know; there have been so many assertions. He is constantly speaking against jobs and constantly speaking against infrastructure. He does not understand the flow-on effect of moving people around and the benefits to our economy of getting people onto trains, getting the transport infrastructure moving. Whether it is our agricultural product, whether it is our manufacturing output and product, we need to move our people and we need to move our goods from A to B. And we need to do so effectively. That is exactly what this side has done.

I am not even going to mention Jeff Kennett, because all of you opposite know about Kennett and people remember. But Dolittle and Nap Time – we know what happened for four years. For four years in this state, nothing happened.

**Nick McGowan** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I remember what happened under Kennett. I remember the train lines around us were ripped out. The services were cut to shreds. I may have been young, but it was imprinted on me. I remember. But back to 2010 to 2014. Victorians know that if those opposite get in again, nothing will happen because all that you understand is opposition – opposition to any action, any activity. There is no plan. There is no desire to see a better quality of life for all Victorians, to ensure that every generation has a better quality of life than those before. That is exactly what we are committed to. To hear this demonisation of workers from those opposite is absolutely shocking.

This motion, as I said before, we will not be supporting it. We have got a range of measures in place that deliver accountability and transparency in government, to ensure that whether it is procurement or whether it is, as I was talking about before, getting people into the workforce, getting that diversity of people into the workforce, we are getting better outcomes for Victoria. When we do that, we get that diversity of skills, that diversity of lived experience, of lived ideas. And do you know what? We get better outcomes collectively for our state. That is our strength. You can see our state's strength with record low unemployment numbers, with businesses opening and with jobs coming on. This is what we see day in, day out. Our expenditure for data, IT and projects with our IT dashboards –

**Nick McGowan:** What has that got to do with anything?

**Tom McINTOSH:** We are talking about transparency and we are talking about accountability. There are a range of measures the government has put in – for example, the government's IT dashboard supports transparency in its procurement activities and publicly discloses specific information about funded projects. Every government department is required to report to the Department of Government Services on all IT projects over \$1 million and provide information on how the projects are progressing and their costs. This is part of our government's commitment to transparency. If you would like to – I was going to say Mr Mulholland or Mr McCracken; help me out here – Mr McGowan, you can go to the dashboard and search by department or by area. You can look at health, transport or IT projects. Mr McGowan, I apologise; it has been a long wacky Wednesday. For each project you can see the project's status and projected cost. You can stay up to date because it is all there, it is all open and it is all transparent.

I think this has been a very wideranging and at times bizarre debate on this motion.

**Nick McGowan:** What's your date of birth? What's your year of birth?

**Tom McINTOSH:** I won't be sharing that, Mr McGowan. I think the Victorian people know that on this side the government are based in community and working for community to deliver better outcomes, better lived experience and better quality of life for every generation than the one before it. We will continue building the infrastructure and we will continue ensuring there are the jobs – quality jobs – the health services, the education and everything that Victorians want, need and deserve.

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:47): It is my great pleasure to rise and speak in support of Mrs Moira Deeming's bill – or in fact her motion today. I wish it was a bill.

**Tom McIntosh:** Where's your belt?

**Nick McGOWAN:** These pants don't require a belt. They are belt-free. But they are also very transparent, I think you will notice – incredibly transparent. It is a great irony that in your speech about transparency in this place and in this Parliament you even refused to tell the people of Victoria your year of birth – not your date of birth, not the day of birth and not the time of birth. When I asked a simple question, 'What's the year of your birth?', that was all too difficult. Straight down to typical Labor form: 'I can't tell you that. That's a confidential item.' Mr McIntosh, my name is member McGowan, or you can call me Nick, just in case you need reminding. I also love the fact that you referenced a member of Parliament that has not even been here all week. My good colleague Mr McCracken is not well.

**Tom McIntosh:** I didn't even know he hadn't been here.

**Nick McGOWAN:** I will send your good wishes to him. But it is comical at the same time as it is very sad that you filibustered your entire speech. I will filibuster just a little bit of mine in response to your silliness because there is an underlying current and a very serious underlying theme here from Mrs Deeming and one that I support wholeheartedly. It is something I preach and it is something that I hope I practise as much as possible, and if I do not and if I let the people of Ringwood down then I hope to do better as the years and months go on – or maybe in reverse order the months and years.

Nonetheless I want to pick up on a couple of points Mr McIntosh said in his speech as part of this debate. First of course he wanted to put out to the people of Victoria how great the Labor Party were doing at creating jobs. Well, this is great in theory, and I support it wholeheartedly, as Mr McIntosh knows. I love nothing more than creating jobs. That is what we are here to do in part – but in partnership as well. Unfortunately, Mr McIntosh, what your budget papers say runs contrary to what you have said – that is, your budget papers consistently predict that unemployment in the state of Victoria will get worse and worse and worse. That is what the Victorian Labor Party are dishing up to the people of Victoria – increased unemployment. Well, that is one hell of a gift. I tell you what, with budget papers like that, who needs enemies? That is just a tragedy that you can reconcile to yourselves that you can go out and sell this budget with a smile on your dial and pretend like it is a good thing for people of Victoria in the full knowledge that what you are doing is selling a pup. And it is not a pretty pup, it is a pretty ugly pup. This pup comes with more and more people on the dole queues. That is a terrible message for the people of Victoria.

Then Mr McIntosh transgressed. Then he went over to pay and how he is for people being well paid. I agree with Mr McIntosh on that point. I agree that people should be well paid for the jobs they do – I have no problem with that. However, where I have some concern is that probably neither the nurses nor the teachers of this state would agree with him, and I would agree with them. You have had ample opportunity in this state. You have had the better part of 20 – maybe even 30 – years to rectify that situation. You have failed to do so – not just you, but all of the previous Labor governments. Mr Bracks – we all remember him, boffin-like Bracks. He used to boffin around the place with a smile on his dial. Again –

**Georgie Crozier:** They just got everything from us.

**Nick McGOWAN:** They did. Exactly right. It is like this Minister for Planning and the one before that. Mr Guy in the other place did a hell of a lot of work. He opened up vast tracts of land so people could have affordable housing. Then Mr Wynne, again, in the other place, did absolutely nothing to ease the pressure for new home owners. As a consequence, we are where we are today, in confluence with all the other silly policies they put in place, including taxation, demonising the private sector and so on and so forth.

But while we are all in favour of people being paid a commensurate and a good wage, I would have to say that from my experience, from speaking with nurses and teachers right across the electorate of Ringwood – from Donvale to Heathmont to Nunawading to Ringwood East – time and again what is



clear is they have been duded by this government and duded by previous Labor governments. Nurses should be paid more, and teachers should be paid more. I can only hope that we can offer them more as the election comes closer in just a couple of years time – 24, 25 months, maybe a little bit more than that.

Then Mr McIntosh transgressed even further. I really did think – and I had to interject at that point in time, and maybe it was not caught, so for the purposes of history let us go there again – that the Thatcher that he was referring to was a form of grass at Bunnings. I am more of a buffalo fan myself. But no, no, he was actually reaching back to ancient history. He even mentioned Kennett. I mean, poor Mr McIntosh. I do not think he was in nappies; I think he was even pre nappies. I think he was so young at that point he was probably just a sparkle in his father's eye. He came into this place and talked about what life was like under Kennett, and then he refused to tell us his date of birth – Mr McIntosh, come on. This is a debate about transparency. I am not even going to ask you what your star sign is. I know that would be revealing a great amount of information, but at some point I will find out your date of birth and I will be able to intertwine that somehow, hopefully creatively, in some sort of speech in this place, because I think the people of Victoria deserve to know. The thing that Mr McIntosh's speech was lacking was any reference to Caesar Augustus. Let us face it, if we are going to reach into ancient history, how far should we go? Let us keep going all the way back to him, shall we? That is not Caesar, the one in the current *Planet of the Apes*, no. This is Caesar Augustus in Rome. It surprises me that he did not choose to do that.

He then transgressed further into how proud he was when he finally got on to debate the subject, as I am doing, of transparency. This is his one example. In that diatribe that he gave to this place, he had one shining example of the effort of this government to tick the transparency box – and it is not a tick, it is more of a fudge; I do not know whether it got anywhere near the box. He was like a kid with crayons, or maybe me with crayons. Let me use myself as an example – I could not quite ever get it in the box at all. I just smudged around the paper, and it was just a complete mess. Well, that was Mr McIntosh's contribution. He said gleefully that their attempt at transparency in this state was to ensure that anything over a million dollars had to be reported to a central body, which of course they would then never report to anyone. It begs the obvious question: what about anything below a million dollars? Are we that flush with money, like the federal Treasurer with his multibillion-dollar credit card? He can swipe that away, that is no problem: 'I'll just give you another Treasurer's advance.' That is the state Treasurer, I am sorry. It is the state Treasurer, that is right; silly me. The state Treasurer and his credit card and his Treasurer's advance – I would like to see that credit card. In fact if Mr McIntosh has that credit card, I would happily borrow it from him, just for a couple of things I want locally in the electorate of Ringwood. I would like some improvements for my schools. I would like the Maroondah Hospital built faster. I would like it done in this term, as was promised. I would like some 40 kilometres per hour zones out of Antonio Park Primary School. I would like a toilet block, if I can too, at the Ringwood East train station. My list is quite exhaustive, and I would have many uses for that credit card. But the very fact that he says that their attempt at ticking that transparency box is to actually in some way make sure that any projects over a million dollars are somehow transparent begs the question: what about all that stuff that is \$999,000 and therefore escapes any transparency whatsoever?

This motion by Mrs Deeming is a very sound one. When people ask me from all my experiences, both in opposition – sadly – and in government – more happily – what is the greatest single improvement we could make in this place, the unequivocal answer from all those experiences is increased transparency. It is the only thing that drives the behaviour of ministers, it is the only thing that drives the behaviour of premiers. I have seen it time and again on all sides of politics – and I will take the politics out of this for the moment; it is the great preserver of good decision-making, because if there is no transparency, there is no sound accountability. Unfortunately, what we have in Victoria – and it has been here now for some decades, plural – is an absence of accountability: because everyone is responsible, no-one is ever accountable. It goes back to the way that we actually have formed our departments – the way those departments, with their secretaries, answer to a number of ministers. It is

a labyrinth. It ensures that poor decision-making is not reprimanded and there are no consequences for it whatsoever.

What Mrs Deeming is proposing here is sound. It talks about things like contracts. For too long in this state governments, plural, have been able to hide behind contracts and use ‘private’ and ‘commercial in confidence’ as a shield for transparency. Well, that is just nonsense. After 12 months the world has moved on. Because this is public money, let us not forget, we are spending – or misspending or misappropriating in some ridiculous way – we ought to be transparent with that. After 12 months, in my mind, any company ought to be able to put themselves out there and accept that when you spend the money of the people of Victoria, the light must shine through. It is absolutely imperative. It is like the great disinfectant. Unfortunately, that disinfectant is well and truly in that bottle; it has not seen the place of Victoria for quite some years, and it is not likely to see the place of Victoria, based on Mr McIntosh’s contribution today, for quite a long period of time.

I have got very little time and I must wrap up, because I have dedicated too much of that to my good colleague Mr McIntosh and his diatribe, but the other last comment here I will make about transparency: there seems to be a plague at the moment in respect to non-disclosure agreements. I take exception – and I know there are colleagues opposite and those on the crossbenches who have taken exception – to some of the non-disclosure agreements. I think they are an affront, to women in particular, and the unions have highlighted this very fact. I think they are an affront to everyday average Victorians. Successive governments have used them. I think they are disgusting. I think at some point in the future we all have to get together and actually stop the use of them. While it may advantage whoever is in government at that point in time, the truth is it shuts people down. It allows these backroom deals and these underhanded compensation deals, which I think are regrettable.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:57): I move:

That debate on this motion be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:57): I move:

That all remaining general business be postponed until the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

#### **Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing**

##### *Report 2022–23*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:58): I appreciate the opportunity to get up and speak on the annual report of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing. The truth is the importance of looking after Victorians’ mental health cannot be overstated. Victoria is home to millions of people, whose wellbeing is integral to the overall health of our community. Mental health is not just an individual concern; it affects families, workplaces and the broader community. That is why this government knows the importance of prioritising mental health support, because when Victorians have access to key services, everybody benefits.

The recently tabled annual report of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing sets out some key mental health services and approaches, such as developing mental health services that are safe, effective, timely and compassionate; putting the evidence of lived experience at the centre of all our work; partnering and collaborating with individual services and organisations with diverse experiences to create better care, treatment and support; connecting the evidence of lived

experience, service provision and research to make care more person centred and compassionate; and making people's outcomes more effective and evidence informed. There is a commitment to transparency, to communicating openly, inviting feedback, listening and responding. Of course there are calls to advocate for policy changes to transform mental health care through inclusive research and real-world evidence.

Having contemporary methods of treatment is key, and in an ever-changing landscape, we must all be ready to listen and learn from people with lived experience, because they are the ones who can help us better shape the mental health system. Addressing mental health issues among Victorians is essential for promoting overall wellness. Mental health is intrinsically connected to physical health, and when provided with adequate support and resources for mental health care, individuals can lead more fulfilling and complete lives while receiving the help they need. The collaborative centre makes it all possible. I would like to thank all the Victorians that have had the courage to share their experiences, both with mental health battles and with this state's mental health system, so we as a government can try to formulate the best possible responses – a key aim of the collaborative centre. Mental health issues can affect anyone regardless of your age, your gender or your background, and by acknowledging and supporting individuals who are struggling with their mental health we create a culture of acceptance and understanding so people can feel comfortable sharing their stories and seeking out the right help.

The Victorian government undertook significant work in addressing mental health issues through the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, launched in 2019. The commission aimed to provide an extensive examination of the mental health system in Victoria, identifying some challenges, gaps and areas needing reform. The commission's final report was released in early 2021, and some of us that were in this place at that time will recall heading over to the Royal Exhibition Building for that. It included 65 recommendations to create a more holistic, compassionate and integrated mental health system. The Allan Labor government committed to focusing on improving access to mental health services, increasing support for people with lived experiences of mental health issues and ensuring that mental health care is responsive to the diverse needs of our community.

Mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression can significantly impact an individual's ability to perform at work or school. By providing support and accommodations for those experiencing mental health challenges, we enable them to contribute their talents and skills to our community.

It is worth noting the enormous contribution from the Minister for Mental Health, who has just walked into this place. I thank her for her esteemed leadership in getting all recommendations of the mental health royal commission adopted. That of course was the commitment made upon the tabling of the final report of the mental health royal commission back in 2021, as I mentioned. We know that the Allan Labor government is taking the necessary steps to ensure that the mental health system within Victoria caters to all people and uses the lived experiences of Victorians so that we can better care for our community. I am only too happy to speak on the annual report of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing this afternoon.

### **Racing Integrity Commissioner**

*Report 2022–23*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:02): I rise to speak on the *Racing Integrity Commissioner: Annual Report 2022–23*, which has been tabled in this place. The racing integrity commissioner plays a very important role in a very large Victorian industry, and that is the racing industry. It is an industry that supports its main racing and its events, but it also supports many other things through various different racecourses and other facilities across the state. One such racecourse is Moonee Valley Racecourse, one that is known to a lot of people in this place. Often it is the site for political conferences, usually for Labor but sometimes those opposite as well.

Today I rise to speak about, in relation to this particular racecourse, a very disturbing event which happened just a few weeks ago at the ALP state conference. Ironically enough, it was otherwise a very good conference where, as I referenced this morning, the Premier made some very important announcements around new laws for tougher penalties for those who assault frontline workers such as retail and fast-food workers, bus drivers and the like. It was ironic in a very disturbing way because we saw the security staff at that venue, at that racecourse, come under threat from the actions of what can only be described as a violent mob of protesters. All the more outrageous was that this activity – when they stormed into the building – happened during a memorial service to some departed federal MPs that we have been acknowledging in this state.

Protest is a very important part of our democracy and I want to underline that absolutely, but peaceful protest is essential. Once you go beyond that, once you say that violent unlawful protest is okay, you are creating a very dangerous precedent not just for yourself but for those who have different views to you. What I am particularly troubled by is elected representatives of this place were speaking at that protest. Dr Ratnam, the member for Brunswick and the member for Melbourne all spoke at that protest that turned violent. Now, I do not for a second suggest that those members themselves turned violent or that they stormed into the building, as so many others did – although I do note that a senator who was elected under the brand of the Greens party was amongst the party who stormed into the building and assaulted and sent hideous verbal abuse at other people.

**David Davis:** We might even agree on this.

**Michael GALEA:** I think we do agree on this, Mr Davis. For you to assault, push, shove, scream in the face of Labor delegates, Labor MPs, even a Labor senator holding his small child, a baby, is disgusting. For you to be storming into a building forcing it into lockdown, storming past the childcare centre, where kids were extremely upset and not knowing what was going on, their parents in another room terrified that their children might be in harm's way and unable to get out of that room to check on their children because they were locked in, because people were slamming on the doors trying to push them in – the noise, as one of the people inside, was absolutely deafening, and to see the footage from afterwards you can absolutely see why. To put parents and children through this at what is a democratic function is unthinkable. It is also unthinkable for homophobic abuse to be screamed into the face of a member of Parliament. I am not allowed to repeat that homophobic abuse in this place, because it would be unparliamentary language. As a member of that community, though, I am sickened that people would see any scenario in which that was acceptable.

Again, there is always a right to protest, but it must be peaceful. My colleague, who is in the room, Mrs Deeming, has been through a very difficult situation over the past year. I am not going to go into the details of that case, but suffice to say, when Mrs Deeming was at the same event as some very unpleasant people, she faced consequences. Three MPs from the Greens were speaking at the event where all of this happened. I do not suggest that they took part in the violence, but they were there, they were speaking, they were rallying that crowd up, and we have heard absolutely nothing from them, from the Greens party or its leadership, about it. We must do better.

**Moira Deeming:** On a point of order, President, I am so sorry to interrupt, but I was not at the same event as that bunch of men who turned up on Parliament steps. They were not at my event, they were in the vicinity. Sorry to interrupt.

**The PRESIDENT:** We used to call that a point of clarification, which we will now. But I do not think Mr Galea was actually indicating that. Were you?

**Michael GALEA:** No. And with respect to the chamber, I will withdraw that comment and not make any comment either way.

**Department of Treasury and Finance***Budget papers 2024–25*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:08): First of all, I will pick up some of the points made by Mr Galea, very quickly, and just make the point that none of us like the threatening and violent behaviour we have seen on campuses and elsewhere. Our Jewish community in particular has a right – as does everyone else – to have free and safe movement. They should not have their activities impeded, they should not face hate speech, they should not face threatening commentary or pressure. I agree with Mr Galea on many of the points that he made.

**The PRESIDENT:** Just for *Hansard*, Mr Davis, you are speaking on the same report as Mr Galea?

**David DAVIS:** I am indeed, and I am about to talk about the budget, and specifically the creative industries section of the budget. I am particularly interested in employment in the creative industries. There is an interplay between the state here in Victoria and the federal spending on creative industries. Two of the biggest organisations in this state, in terms of spending in creative industries, are the ABC and the SBS. I want to say something very clear about these bodies, which are terribly Sydney-based, terribly Sydney-centric. Both of them have board appointments up now, board appointments that were advertised on 6 May 2024 – current vacancies, ABC board and SBS board. I make the point that the ABC board currently has one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine members – six of whom live in Sydney, one of whom is based in Canberra. So seven of the nine members are in that axis between Sydney and Melbourne, but two-thirds of the board are Sydney-based individuals. This is an absolute outrage. No wonder it has a Sydney-centric feel. No wonder we feel like we are listening to the Sydney broadcasting corporation.

This is important because creative industries jobs relate to spending by a number of these big federal bodies. SBS has got hundreds of millions of dollars of money that is there spent every year. The ABC has about \$1.1 billion spent every year. These are huge spends that employ people and that actually spin off a range of film and television matters. Whole industries are linked to them, whether they be films or other things like that, and all of those jobs in the creative industries are paid for by taxpayers. They are paid for by Australian taxpayers, and Victorian taxpayers are 25 per cent of Australian taxpayers. I tell you what, we do not have 25 per cent of the people on the ABC board, and we do not have 25 per cent of the spending down here. We actually need to have our fair share.

There is plenty to say about the ABC and the problems at the ABC. I have noticed the issues with Laura Tingle in this recent period and the commentary that she has made – the clearly biased commentary. I have not traditionally been a person who worries about the ABC's views in general, but this has become ridiculous. I do think that Laura Tingle has gone too far, and a number of these other ABC commentators have gone too far. Gone are the days when the ABC was a middle-of-the-road organisation that reflected relatively conservative values. Gone are the days when the organisation spent around the country much more evenly. The share in Victoria is not up to scratch, and we need to make sure that 25 per cent of the board are Victorians, 25 per cent of the spending is in Victoria and 25 per cent of the linkage spending, the downstream spending, that comes from these federal bodies, which is paid for by Victorian taxpayers, occurs to the tune of roughly 25 per cent, because that is our population and taxation share.

This is about jobs. It is about thousands and thousands of jobs, and it is about reflecting our country properly and reflecting it evenly so that our multicultural communities are in a stronger position. Mr Luu and I have both talked about the fact that the SBS is making a wrong move in moving from a Sydney suburb to the western suburbs of Sydney. They cannot have both national broadcasters and all the spending that goes with them. Whatever the ABC's problems, it is a huge amount of money. It is a huge number of jobs. It is a huge amount of reflection on our community, and our multicultural community is in Melbourne, not in Sydney.

**Gender identity***Petition*

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:13): I rise to speak on a petition presented to the Legislative Council recently by my colleague Mrs Bev McArthur, on 14 May, that relates to gender identity services for young people. The petition calls on the government to urgently implement an impartial, transparent, ethical and independent inquiry into gender identity services for children and adolescents and consult with medical professionals and young people and their families who have lived experiences about the current end-to-end treatment process. I note that the petition was tabled with over 1400 signatures and that the Minister for Health is due to provide a response by 13 June.

Whenever changes are introduced by this Parliament, we have a shared responsibility to consider the impact of those changes. As members of this chamber are aware, the Cass review was recently released in the UK, and I agree with my colleague Ms Crozier that it is an important review that should not be dismissed. It is important that any review considers the range of medical views so that we are informed by the impact of these changes by medical and health professionals.

I attended a forum hosted by Mr Limbrick at Parliament last year and heard directly from people who had undertaken treatment and taken puberty blockers, and I heard about the devastating impacts that this treatment has had on their lives. It is important that we listen to them and also that we listen to parents as well. During the parliamentary inquiry into the state education system in Victoria, hearings have been held across the state, including in Bendigo and Shepparton in Northern Victoria, and I thank my Nationals colleague Melina Bath, a former teacher, for shining a light on Victoria's education system. The committee is looking into various elements of the education system, including student wellbeing, measures to address poor mental health and student disengagement. During those hearings Parents of Adolescents with Gender Distress Victoria presented at the hearing and made a submission to the inquiry, and I quote from their submission. It says:

All our children have self-diagnosed with the encouragement of peers, school personnel and on-line resources such as TikTok. It is notable that gender distress peaked for the majority of our children during or shortly after the Covid pandemic when their mental health was noticeably more fragile.

In numerous cases, and contrary to the principles of both the Education and Training Reform Act ... and the Child Youth and Families Act 2005, school personnel have intentionally excluded and alienated parents from discussions regarding their child's gender distress and mental wellbeing.

We are particularly concerned with the well-intentioned but ill-informed willingness to implement 'social transition' without consulting parents. For the children who are struggling with mental health and identity formation, this intervention compounds their distress and increases their mental instability.

It also stated:

Intentionally alienating parents in the process isolates them from their most important support structure at a time when they need it most. It is also a significant psychosocial intervention that school employees are woefully uninformed about and unqualified to make. The Interim Report of The Cass Review in the UK observed that "social transition is an active intervention because it may have significant effects on the child or young person in terms of their psychological functioning".

PAGD VIC also believe that the uncritical acceptance of gender ideology as fact that is championed by the Education Department, lacks evidence and fails to deliver improved wellbeing for our children.

It is disturbing to hear that parents have been excluded from discussions regarding their child and that a social transition was implemented without consulting parents. I am concerned that under this government the rights of parents are being eroded. In responding to this petition, I ask the minister to reflect on the feedback of people who have been through the treatment and parents who are directly impacted and commit to undertaking an independent review into gender identity services and the treatment process for children and adolescents. It is important that we prioritise the safety and wellbeing of our children, listen to the voices of those with lived experience and learn from it.

**Department of Treasury and Finance***Budget papers 2024–25*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:17): I rise to speak on the budget for this year, and I particularly want to speak on the health outputs and, importantly, the ambulance services outputs in the budget. Around about a quarter past 2 today I received a call from a constituent in Shepparton to say he was at the hospital and there were eight ambulances ramped at the Goulburn Valley base hospital. He actually took a little video which he sent to me that I have posted on social media. He then told me when he sent me through that video that he had just left, but as he was leaving there was a ninth ambulance arriving at Goulburn Valley Health. It is absolutely appalling. This comes very shortly after an incident that we had on 7 May. In fact at 1 o'clock on 7 May as the Treasurer was getting to his feet to deliver the budget – a budget that cut \$207 million from public health and \$20 million from ambulance services in Victoria – I received a call at my office from a constituent who had been waiting at the emergency department with her daughter since 7 am. At 1 o'clock they still had not been seen. She told me at that point that there were nine ambulances ramped at Goulburn Valley Health at 1 o'clock on budget day. Another constituent counted them later in the day and rang us to tell us there were 13 ambulances ramped at Goulburn Valley Health that day. Even the Victorian Ambulance Union tweeted about it that day. They posted a video similar to the one that I posted today showing those ambulances ramped, and the ambulance union said:

Dont get sick in Shepparton, Mooroopna, Tatura or Numurkah ...

or Cobram. They said:

All of your ambulances are currently ramped at Goulburn Valley Hospital.

This is due the government not supporting our health network. We know that in Shepparton our health professionals do a tremendous job, but they do it under great stress. They do it under conditions that are not adequate, also they do it with very few staff. We know at Goulburn Valley Health they are about 550 staff short. More than 200 of those are nursing staff, yet this government will not invest in a clinical health school in Shepparton that would help to train more health professionals and boost our health workforce. We know we need more people at Goulburn Valley Health, but we also need stage 2 of the hospital completed to make sure that we have a service that is of a size that is adequate to service the demand that comes from the Goulburn Valley region.

This government is making it harder for Victorians on every level, whether that be economic with the cost of living, whether it be by making home ownership harder to get into because their policies are driving up the cost of a home or whether it be with access to education through their taxes on schools. They are just making it harder for everyone, and they are making it harder to get adequate health care for your family because you cannot get the service at the local hospital you need. Amalgamations of hospitals will only add to this. If they amalgamate every hospital in regional Victoria into the six services that they say, Shepparton – Goulburn Valley Health – would manage a number of hospitals as far away as Albury–Wodonga, Mansfield, Bright and Mount Beauty. This would be a disaster for local health services. Local health services want local boards that concentrate on the health needs of that community. They do not want to be managed from far afield, and of course Goulburn Valley Health are having enough trouble as it is managing their own shortages and servicing the people they need to service at the moment. Without an adequate health workforce we will see the closure of smaller country hospitals under this amalgamation as they bring the services and the staff from those hospitals back into the larger hospitals that are eating up demand.

This government is making it harder for Victorians. They need to look their policies, and they need to change them.

*Adjournment*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:23): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Patrick School of the Arts**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:23): (917) My matter is for the attention of the minister for tertiary education or skills and so forth these days, a minister who is not in the chamber today, and I understand that fully. But I do make some points here about Melbourne Polytechnic, which is an important campus inside the electorate that Ms Crozier and I represent, in the Prahran electorate. It is a very important facility, and it has been in limbo significantly for a number of years under this government. The government has not been able to make a final decision on the way forward in terms of managing the future of the Melbourne Polytechnic site and how that should be best used in the interests of Victorians and in particular in the interests of tertiary education.

One of the largest footprints on the campus now is the Patrick School of the Arts, which teaches dance and all of the arts related to many of these areas that are so important for our state going forward. That has been a long-term tenant; it is a private body, but it rents from Melbourne Polytechnic. The government's indecision, the government's fluffing, the government's uncertainty has led to a terrible situation. I am going to quote from Todd Patrick's email to me today:

... Melbourne Polytechnic on behalf of the department has offered me a 3 year lease plus 1 plus 1. Melbourne Polytechnic has been given a secured 5 year lease, at the absolute minimum, that's what we would be wanting.

A private business like his, which is investing, which is wanting to expand and which is wanting to do more, needs the predictability and certainty of a long and clear lease.

A few weeks ago a representative of the department told me it was going to be 7 years, then a few weeks later I'm offered 3 and now yesterday, Melbourne Polytechnic was telling me they were instructed by government to only offer me 3 +1+1 but a representative of Gayle Tierneys office, told me on the phone that that was actually Melbourne Polytechnics choice.

Indeed, they went further – they indicated that the minister's office had said they should have five years. Mr Patrick said to me:

I have no idea who to believe out of the two of them.

Ultimately, I now have one of the largest footprints on campus, I'm not asking for money, I just need a secured long term lease for the continued arts education, for my secondary school and tertiary programs.

It is a unique school that fills a very important void in education. It is actually a private facility, but it complements secondary school and it complements the Melbourne Polytechnic offerings as well. So what I want the minister to do is to intervene and to ensure that a five-year minimum lease is offered to Mr Patrick. It is not suitable to leave a private business that is so important hanging like this. The uncertainty in the future of Melbourne Polytechnic needs to be cleaned up.

**Family violence**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:26): (918) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. The action I seek from the minister is to provide more specific funding and support for preventative and protective programs for women, children and men experiencing family violence in regional Victoria. Victims and survivors are crying out for help, and the need is particularly urgent in regional Victoria. Recent figures from the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency show exactly how horrendous the situation is. The current situation has been described as a perfect storm for family and gendered violence, where serious assaults occur at double or even triple the rate of Melbourne. Three of the top five local government areas for serious family violence assaults in Victoria are in my electorate of Northern Victoria. These are Shepparton, Swan Hill and Benalla. Greater Shepparton is the worst LGA in the state, with a rate of 379.3 incidents per 100,000 people.



This is nearly three times the rate of Wyndham, the worst Melbourne LGA. The top 17 LGAs and 28 of the top 30 with the highest rates of family violence were all in regional Victoria. Four of the six women killed in Victoria so far in 2024 are from regional Victoria. In Bendigo police have responded to 4500 family violence incidents in the past 12 months.

A campaign currently being run by the *Bendigo Advertiser* and Australian Community Media, Breaking the Silence in Regional Violence, highlights the particular difficulties that people in regional areas have in surviving and/or leaving an abusive relationship. While the government have talked about spending more money on family violence prevention, they have not done anything to target the regions specifically. There is an urgent need for emergency housing and support services. The availability of emergency housing in regional Victoria is sparse, to say the least. We have had incidents of people escaping domestic violence being offered tents to sleep in. We also need more adequate resources for the frontline services dealing with assault, sexual assault and other forms of violence in our community. Our local services do extraordinary work, but they are always busy and at times overwhelmed by the demand. These include the Centre Against Sexual Assault, the Centre for Non-Violence, the Orange Door and Anglicare. There are also other frontline workers, including police, paramedics and health workers, who see the effects of this family violence every day.

The figures from the Crime Statistics Agency show we are certainly in the midst of a family violence crisis. It is worth noting that these figures only include incidents that involve police. No doubt there are many incidents of family violence that go unreported. The need for increased and continued funding that is specific to regional Victoria is clear. It is needed. I ask the minister to act on this as a matter of urgency.

### **Rural and regional roads**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:29): (919) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. In the 2024–25 state budget the Allan Labor government announced a 10-year \$6.6 billion investment in road maintenance for Victoria's neglected and unsafe road network. This announcement included funding of \$964 million allocated in the next financial year to repair and maintain our roads. What the budget did not specify is how much of this \$964 million will be allocated to fix regional roads, including those in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. Northern Victorians are faced daily with dangerous road conditions, including crumbling roads, potholes, rutting and extremely rough surfaces. Many of these issues are in my electorate of the Northern Victoria Region on major highways, such as the Hume and the Goulburn Valley freeways, which carry thousands of cars, trucks and buses each day. They face damage to their vehicles and possible harm to themselves because of these unacceptable conditions – flat tyres, damages to rims and undercarriages and wheel alignments thrown out from the constant bumping and jerking from the uneven road surfaces.

What the government fails to understand is that country people believe they have been ignored when it comes to road maintenance funding – and quite honestly, who could blame them. My constituents, and I am sure the constituents of all of my regional colleagues in this place, want transparency as to where this proposed roads funding is going. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide the specific funding amounts from the proposed \$964 million that will be allocated to each regional area to improve our unsafe road network.

### **Dederang battery project**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:31): (920) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns a proposed battery energy storage system to be installed near the Dederang terminal station. The action that I seek is that the minister agrees to meet with the community members in Dederang to hear their concerns about the battery energy storage systems proposed to be built in the area.

On 7 May 2024 the member for Murray Valley tabled petition 202418, which requested the Legislative Assembly to call on the Minister for Planning to reject this proposal due to the widespread community opposition, the risks to community health and wellbeing, concerns about environmental impacts on this sensitive environment, the loss of prime agricultural land, the increase in bushfire risk in a high bushfire risk area and the impacts on landscape and tourism in an area covered by significant landscape overlay. The Minister for Planning must start listening to the concerns of the Kiewa Valley community regarding the battery systems that are proposed to be built near Dederang terminal station. It is shameful that this government has shut down the community voices by preventing third-party VCAT appeals. This Labor government does not want to consult, and it does not want to listen to what locals have to say.

I am certainly not against renewable energy projects. Renewables will have an important role to play in Victoria's future energy mix, along with gas and other energy sources. Batteries will also have a role to play in storing excess renewable energy when supply peaks and allowing that energy to be used later in the day when renewables supply drops, but we must have an honest appreciation of the risks that come with the new lithium battery technology. These batteries are prone to catching fire when they overheat, and if a large battery starts burning, the fire can last for days. We saw this in 2021 when the Victorian Big Battery near Geelong caught fire on a Friday morning and burnt into Sunday. The risk of battery fires becomes deadly serious when the battery system is proposed to be located in an extreme bushfire area and backs onto bushland, and that is exactly what is proposed in Dederang. Can you imagine what would happen if a battery caught fire on a 40-plus degree day and high winds spread the sparks and flames into nearby bushland? It could start a devastating bushfire. The CFA members who would have to fight that fire are the very ones raising concerns about these proposed battery installations. Hundreds of residents turned out to a community meeting in Dederang to discuss these proposals, but no-one from the government or from the companies who want to build these batteries bothered to turn up. So the community started a petition to get the government to listen, and I urge the minister to pay attention.

### **Dairy industry**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:34): (921) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for the government to fund a transition program for farmers. In 2023 academics utilising KG2, Australia's largest independent agricultural market research company, conducted a survey of Australian dairy farmers' attitudes towards their business, its challenges and transitioning to alternative enterprises, featuring responses from 147 Australian dairy farmers, with 65 per cent being from Victoria. Increasingly low profitability for dairy farmers, changing consumer preferences towards plant-based alternatives, climate change impacts, labour shortages, rising production costs and deterioration of farmers' mental health were all identified as primary challenges, leading to more than half of farmers surveyed declaring they are open to exploring agricultural alternatives to dairy farming. This amount increased if it was accompanied by government support. Many cited that transitioning to beef would be less favourable than the dairy industry, with a significant downgrade in profitability. This is reflected in 36 per cent of those surveyed expressing a current willingness to transition into horticultural or other business ventures if government support and assistance were provided.

It is scientifically known that the commercial and environmental viability of animal agriculture is becoming unsustainable. Dairy farmers reported that the financial impacts of the industry have meant a loss of production, animal health and mental health, with causes ranging from volatile prices, extensive land and water usage by the dairy industry, inefficient food production and significant contributions to greenhouse gas emissions. The industry is flailing and struggling to go on. Sixty-eight per cent said the challenges they face as dairy farmers had impacted their own or their family's mental health and wellbeing. An Australian-first study over a decade revealed that a farmer dies by suicide every 10 days, meaning a 60 per cent higher suicide rate among farmers compared to non-farmers.

With one-third of farmers already considering a transition and 54 per cent open to alternatives, those seeking to get out of the industry must be supported by the government before it is too late. In the absence of government assistance Farm Transitions Australia has stepped up, providing free support services to dairy farmers experiencing hardship. They offer business plans; advice from financial planners, career path experts and ex-dairy farmers; mental health tools; and resource provisions supporting farms to transition to regenerative farming or other careers. Farmers and their animals should not suffer to keep a dying industry alive if they do not want to, and this government must answer their calls and fund a transition program for farmers to move to alternative, sustainable enterprises.

### **Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:37): (922) My adjournment debate is for the Attorney-General and concerns the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. I pointed out in a previous adjournment that the VEOHRC guidance on Victoria's conversion practice legislation has been at best contentious and in fact almost certainly incorrect. I question whether their overreach in interpreting the law came from incompetence or from ideology. Recent events suggest it is the latter. In a webinar last week, principal adviser at the organisation Kenton Miller made incorrect, misleading and opinionated statements in what was supposed to be a public information briefing. He claimed, factually incorrectly, that the recent Cass review was:

... based on a very limited number of studies only within the UK

and described it as part of 'dangerous messaging' that it is unnatural to be transgender. The review says no such thing. It could only be interpreted this way by someone who prejudged it and was hell-bent on discrediting it. Referring to the report's eminent author, he said:

Because we now live in a very global village, unfortunately, that means we get to inherit some of the village idiots from other places, which means that a lot of the disinformation that's out there, such as the Cass report, makes its way into our headlines and our media ...

I am sorry the Cass review has not vindicated Kenton Miller's personal opinions. If he studied it more carefully, he might accord it more respect. But my real concern is what this says about the VEOHRC. I would care less if this were a charity or an advocacy organisation, but the fact is it is a taxpayer-funded, quasi-judicial body, supposed to present fair and objective guidance. It is appalling that employees in an organisation of this standing should abandon any pretence of neutrality and act as paid activists for what has become, I am sorry to say, an ideological cause. We know all about the collapse in political neutrality in Victoria's public service, but this illustrates an equally damaging but harder to police bias: that of activists and ideologues. It is appalling that individuals are allowed to push their own agendas with the backing of the state.

The action I seek of the minister is a statement clarifying whether this webinar reflected the view of the VEOHRC, and if not, what she will do to stop impolite, incorrect outbursts from public officials misleading Victorians in the future.

### **Middle East conflict**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:40): (923) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to meet with Victorian community members who are protesting in support of Palestine. Just this morning there was a report of a second airstrike on a tent camp in Rafah, the designated evacuation zone of Gaza – a humanitarian zone and a place where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering. The strike killed 21 Palestinians and injured 60. This report was only two days after Israel killed 45 people in a similar strike on a tent camp in Rafah. The video and images of this horrific attack fit in alongside months and months of almost identical footage of people dying and children dying in the most gruesome of ways – still in their nappies, in their favourite jumpers, calling for someone to help them.

But you turn around and say, ‘Why would anyone protest if not for political gain?’ The Labor government sees the atrocities being committed against the Palestinian people and sees the community crying out and doing everything they can to get you to listen and end our partnerships with weapons companies. You see the pain, the suffering and the hurt in the community, and then you accuse them of manufacturing it for political gain. You accuse them of bringing division to the streets. It is beyond belief. It is horrifying. It is insulting. Then to top it off, you tell those people – people who want peace and an end to the occupation and end to the suffering – that they are uneducated on history and that they are falling for misinformation. How uneducated is it to know the value of a child’s life? Are those recorded civilian deaths, those children who died, simply misinformation? The people on the streets are calling for a ceasefire, an enduring peace and for you to end partnerships with weapons companies – a bare minimum request – and in response you insult them.

### **Craigieburn train station**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:42): (924) My adjournment today is directed towards the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to investigate a new overflow car park at Craigieburn station. As many of my constituents can affirm, navigating the roads, buses and trains in Craigieburn has become an increasingly arduous task. It has come to my attention that the overflow car park at Craigieburn station reaches maximum capacity on a daily basis, exacerbating the already daunting challenge many commuters find themselves with in finding suitable parking to catch their trains on time. The issue is compounded by insufficient funding and limited availability of bus services, particularly during peak hours in the mornings and afternoons, and the lack of viable options forces residents to rely on driving to the station or, worse, enduring lengthy journeys all the way to their workplaces. The frustration among affected residents is palpable, and it is disheartening to see their concerns continually overlooked by government.

Furthermore, it is very evident that the car park on Interlink Drive serves not only Craigieburn residents but those from all around surrounding growth areas like Donnybrook, Mickleham and Epping. Therefore addressing this parking shortage is not only a matter of local concern but one that impacts the broader northern suburbs, given the government has no plans for electrification beyond Craigieburn, which would be very wise. The underfunding of public transport services within the Northern Metro electorate exacerbates the situation, leading to a surge in congestion on our already overcrowded roads like Craigieburn Road and Mickleham Road.

I recently met with Dennis Moore at the Craigieburn Residents’ Association, and they have put to me a great proposal to use additional land to the south of the Craigieburn train maintenance facility between the Hume Highway to actually build additional car spaces at Craigieburn station. They have also suggested boosting the frequency of buses between 7 and 9 am and 4 and 6 pm. We know there has been some great research recently on buses – and forgive me, but I am a bit of a public transport nerd. If you look at places like Infrastructure Victoria and other research out there, it shows that the more frequent the bus, the better value it is – about \$2.45 return for every dollar spent on frequent buses. I seek the action of the minister to investigate options for using the land at the south of the Craigieburn train maintenance facility for a car park and investigate boosting the frequency of buses between 7 and 9 am and 4 and 6 pm at Craigieburn station.

### **Joseph Road precinct, Footscray**

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:45): (925) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my ask is for the government to take an active role in the works currently taking place to make the Joseph Road precinct in Footscray safer. Despite new developments bringing hundreds of people to this precinct in the city’s growing west, little care has gone into protecting the safety and wellbeing of those that live, work and commute around this area. Joseph Road is notorious for its lack of safe crossings and needlessly high speed limits. It is these issues that tragically led to the death of a young woman, Frances Jeyann Ramirez, last year and that put at risk the wellbeing of community members on a regular basis. Community groups have tirelessly

campaigned for authorities to take meaningful action, and finally some progress is being made, with the City of Maribyrnong council commencing works to improve pedestrian safety around Joseph Road. However, these works will not be finalised until December, and it is unclear whether the works will resolve all of the outstanding safety issues.

On a previous occasion I asked the state government to take a role in coordinating and funding the appropriate works to make the Joseph Road precinct safe. Your response, Minister, was to handball responsibility for the works to Maribyrnong City Council. The poor planning of this area is a direct result of the planning approvals made by then Minister for Planning Matthew Guy. That is why it is incumbent on the state government to intervene and fix the problems of its own level of government's making. Minister, this is why I am asking the state government to actively collaborate with local authorities and to support them, including financially, to undertake the full gamut of upgrade works required to make Joseph Road safe. This includes installing traffic lights at the Hallenstein Street–Moreland Street–Hopkins Street intersection, establishing active transport links and updating pathways along Hopkins Street in response to the urgent concerns raised by residents.

### Sobering facilities

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:47): (926) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Mental Health, so I am glad she is in the house today. Earlier today in question time I was asking the minister when she will release the report on the sobering-up trial. The report was due to be released last August, and the sobering-up centres in both Collingwood and St Kilda have caused significant issues for those residents within those local communities. The minister refused to answer that very important question, and despite referencing the report in question time she will not release it to the Victorian community.

In her answer the minister went on a frolic about what I was doing last Friday, including what she described as taking videos of the centre in St Kilda – which I was not. It is true I was in my electorate meeting a number of constituents and stakeholders about antisocial behaviour and community safety in general. One of those constituents that I have been speaking with regularly lives opposite the St Kilda sobering-up centre in Mitchell Street. It is true that I phoned my constituent to say that I had come down to see the centre and to meet with her if she was at home. It is also true that I took a photo of the centre because above the door there is a sign that says, 'Galiamble house rules: any person under the influence of alcohol will not be permitted entry'. It is rather odd to have such a sign at the entrance of dedicated sobering-up centre, which the minister herself was visiting on Friday. A number of residents have written to the minister about their concerns but disappointingly have never received any response.

In an email on 3 April to the minister my constituent pointed out the distress she and her family have to endure. She went on to speak about how she had to ring 000 following an incident that happened to her. She spoke about the issue of the increase in crime since that centre has opened. She talked about the employees and what they are doing with parking. She talked about the experience of walk-up drunk people arriving on foot and sleeping on the doorstep when no-one has been at the facility, even though it is supposed to be open 24 hours a day and we were informed there were to be no walk-ups at all. She went on to speak about the parking issue in the street, and concerningly she said in this email to the minister:

The employee then started **screaming** at me "You don't own this street, what do you do lady? Get a life lady! You add nothing to this community, we are doing good work, what do you do? Nothing, you do nothing!"

He proceeded to tell me "they were here first?". I have no idea what that means. He continued to scream at me "you have no life"

She went on very emotionally and said it was:

Extremely aggressive, confrontational – I was on my own ...

I then got in the car and broke down, crying hysterically as I was so frightened and I called 000.

She said a number of other things about the enduring stress that she and her family are experiencing.

It is extremely disappointing that the minister refuses to acknowledge the concerns of residents or to even engage with them. The action I seek is for the minister to respond to my constituent's emails and in particular to address the very important issue that she raises about the unprofessional and unacceptable behaviour of the employees of the sobering-up centre in St Kilda and provide to my constituent what action she will take in relation to those concerns that she has raised with the minister directly.

### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:51): (927) The action I seek is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. In September 2022 the Suburban Rail Loop East project was designated, which gave the Suburban Rail Loop Authority land acquisition powers. In the months and years since many businesses and houses have received notices of intention to acquire and then acquisition notices from the SRLA. The acquisition notices confused and worried many in my electorate. Residents felt they appeared out of nowhere. There has also been a lack of translation services. One resident in Box Hill found out their property was being acquired only three weeks after moving in. Families, both newcomers to the area and those who have lived there for generations, are now being abruptly told to pack up and leave their homes.

My constituents in the SRLA planning precincts who have not yet received any information on property acquisition are still worried about this occurring as the SRL works continue. Residents are scared to renovate, repair or make any changes to their properties. This is completely understandable. Why would those in my electorate use their hard-earned money to make investments in their own property with the threat of it being suddenly seized by the SRLA looming in the background. This government has not told those in the SRL precincts how many houses have been acquired and how long the property acquisitions will continue for. Given this project is already disastrously over budget, there are concerns in the community about how much money is being spent on acquiring properties and if it is being spent responsibly or if the development will be further intensified to meet funding shortfalls. The minister and his government must give certainty to those in the planning areas so that they can continue living in their properties without worry. They should be able to renovate homes, make changes and live without fear of the SRLA swooping in to take their property at any moment.

The action I seek from the minister is to urgently confirm how many houses will be acquired, when they will be acquired, how much is being spent on property acquisition by the Suburban Rail Loop Authority and whether the minister will rule out any further changes to precinct plans and housing density areas within the overall SRL precinct plans.

### **Landcare funding**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:53): (928) This evening's adjournment is for the Minister for Environment, and it relates to the government's cutting of ongoing funding for Landcare facilitators and coordinators. The action I seek from the minister is to find the funds – reallocate funding – to ensure that there is continued operation of Landcare Victoria Inc beyond 2025 to support the vital role that our volunteer land carers play in tackling diversity loss, habitat restoration and weed and pest control.

Landcare is a volunteer grassroots movement. My understanding is it started as a collaboration between the Victorian Farmers Federation and Joan Kirner back in the 1980s to tackle farmland, public land and waterway degradation. There are many different versions of that in my electorate. We will say it was us and it was our weed eradication. Landcare evokes passion – passion to the extent that when we interviewed in 2021 the then CEO of Landcare, whose name is Andrew Maclean, he spoke about 600 groups, 17,000 families and 60,000 individual members. There are a diverse range of activities in restoration and in support of ecosystems, including fox and rabbit control projects in Venus Bay. The Bass Coast Landcare Network is leading the climate change adaptation project with

its mass plantings. The South Gippsland Landcare Network is looking at threatened invertebrates in the western Strzeleckis. Yarram Landcare looks at and helps with coastal saltmarsh protection and wetlands revival. Whether it is pests, weeds, habitat restoration or projects on private land or on public land, tree planting is the religion of Landcare, and we all should sign up. I know when I first came in here some many years ago I planted with Landcare, and I went back recently and saw the growth of those beautiful native trees around Korumburra waterways.

What we now know also is that this government is cutting funding after June. There is only funding up to June next year. They are cutting part-time Landcare facilitators and regional Landcare coordinators. On that same inquiry we heard that the Landcare facilitators program was an outstanding program that supported the important work that the volunteers did – leveraged that work. We heard that the coordinators look at data collection and group coordination surveys to know that the work that they are doing makes a difference.

In our own small way, in the minority report into the declining ecosystems, I and the Nationals and Liberals called on this Victorian government to invest in strengthening regionally based natural resource management programs, including Landcare. So I call on the minister to reinvest. Find the money and continue the support for Landcare coordinators and facilitators.

#### **Werribee Main Road–Princes Freeway interchange**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (17:56): (929) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the road congestion and traffic hazard at the Princes Freeway interchange in Werribee in my electorate. This is an ongoing problem. Not only is it causing hazards and inconvenience to motorists, but it also poses a serious safety hazard and risk, particularly due to the blocking of access to emergency lanes. So the action I seek is for the minister to take action and upgrade the Werribee Main Road exit on the Princes Freeway to address the traffic bottleneck at the Werribee interchange, improve motorist safety and ensure the efficient flow of traffic along the carriageway.

Recent dash cam footage has captured an alarming situation at the Werribee Main Road exit, showing motorists forced to queue for kilometres in traffic congestion. Motorists travelling along the freeway are not aware of the congestion due to the extended length of the queue. Having to attempt to merge and change lanes at the very last minute in very fast moving traffic is causing a traffic hazard.

Despite repeated complaints and community consultation conducted by the state government, very little progress has been made to address the issue, leaving commuters frustrated and vulnerable. The safety concerns raised by my constituents and commuters are troubling. The reports indicate that a significant majority of motorists feel unsafe when using the interchange, especially during peak hours. Congestion and difficulty exiting the freeway are not only impeding the smooth flow of traffic but jeopardising the safety of commuters and emergency responders.

It is crucial to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of all road users, so could the minister please address the issues and the hazards? It is imperative that the government allocates sufficient funds to fix the road and upgrade the exit for road users and emergency responders.

#### **Responses**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:58): There were 13 adjournment matters this evening to 11 different ministers, and I will ensure that they are referred for a written response in accordance with the standing orders.

In relation to Ms Crozier's adjournment matter, I am happy to acquit that matter now. Obviously there have been a number of exchanges between Ms Crozier and me today about these issues. I am aware of the resident's correspondence that she is referring to. I brought to the attention of my department the contents of that correspondence –

**Georgie Crozier:** When – tonight?

**Ingrid STITT:** No, not tonight – when I received the correspondence, Ms Crozier. The department has been working closely with Ngwala in terms of that situation. I understand that also the local member, Nina Taylor MP, has met with that particular resident and discussed these issues with her. I do want to reiterate that Ngwala has been operating out of that premises for 50 years, and it is a well-respected community health service in the area and indeed has a fantastic reputation across the state. I could also advise the house that Ngwala have engaged with local residents through their own letterboxing. They have invited local residents to tour the sobering centre and ask questions of the staff, and most residents have engaged through these forums and have expressed a lot of support for the work that they are doing.

I think it is important to remember that these staff are working in pretty challenging circumstances. It is completely inappropriate for anybody to film or photograph their premises or the staff or clients of that service without their consent. I obviously receive a lot of correspondence right across the mental health portfolio, and I reply to all the correspondence I receive. Your constituent will receive a written response from me in due course.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, I just need some clarification. I was talking about the very aggressive and abusive language from the employees to my resident. A number of residents have written to the minister, and none of them have ever received anything from the minister, so it is very convenient for her to say, ‘Yes, they will receive a response since I have received it.’

**The PRESIDENT:** I do not know if that is a point of order, Ms Crozier.

**Georgie Crozier:** My clarification point of order is that my action was: will she speak directly about what action she will take, given these employees –

**Ingrid Stitt** interjected.

**Georgie Crozier:** Yes, I did. The action – I will read it again.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! It is not for me to direct the minister how she acquits the adjournment matter, but I believe the minister acquitted the adjournment matter.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, this is the problem. I mean, the minister says she will acquit it in here, but my action is particularly around providing to my constituent what action she will take in relation to this very serious issue.

**The PRESIDENT:** Once again, it is not for me to direct the minister how she acquits her adjournment matter.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT (18:02):** Just before we adjourn, I was asked to review two questions, a substantive question and a supplementary question, by Dr Mansfield to Minister Shing. For the substantive question, in reviewing it I believe it was responded to. As far as the supplementary question goes, it was very close to being answered, but for the sake of transparency I think I will ask Minister Shing if she could give a written response to Dr Mansfield. Because of the lateness of today, we will make that in two days rather than the prescribed one day.

The house is adjourned.

**House adjourned 6:03 pm.**



*Joint sitting of Parliament***Senate vacancy****Members of both houses met in Assembly chamber at 6:32 pm.**

**The CHAIR (Shaun Leane):** Welcome to the joint sitting of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly to choose a person to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the unfortunate, sad death of Senator Linda White. I now invite proposals from members for the appointment of a person to hold the vacant place in the Senate.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier): I propose:

That Lisa Darmanin hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the death of Senator Linda White.

She is willing to accept the nomination. In order to satisfy the joint sitting as to the requirements of section 15 of the Commonwealth constitution, I also advise that the President has advice from the state secretary of the Australian Labor Party Victorian branch that Lisa Darmanin is the selection of the Australian Labor Party, the party previously represented in the Senate by Senator Linda White.

**The CHAIR:** Is there someone who seconds the proposal?

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition): I second the proposal.

**The CHAIR:** Are there any further proposals? As only one person has been proposed, I declare that Lisa Darmanin has been chosen to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant by the unfortunate, sad death of Senator Linda White.

I now declare the joint sitting closed.

**Proceedings terminated 6:34 pm.**