



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 21 February 2023

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

Matthew Bach

| Member | Region | Party | Member | Region | Party |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------|---------------------|----------------------------|--------|
| Bach, Matthew | 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, Nicholas | North-Eastern Metropolitan | Lib |
| Bourman, Jeff | Eastern Victoria | SFFP | McIntosh, Tom | Eastern Victoria | ALP |
| Broad, Gaelle | 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 | Western Metropolitan | Lib | 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 | South-Eastern Metropolitan | LDP | Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee | Northern Victoria | PHON |
| Lovell, Wendy | Northern Victoria | Lib | Watt, Sheena | Northern Metropolitan | ALP |

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;
 Greens – Australian Greens; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria; LDP – Liberal Democratic Party;
 Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation;
 SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Tuesday 21 February 2023

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:02 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Corrections system

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:04): (33) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, the government commissioned a review into the adult corrections system in June 2021, which was due by June last year. This report was into major concerns in the prison system in Victoria, including the treatment of prisoners, record keeping and the rewriting of reports to cover up offensive behaviour. I am advised the response has never been released. Will you release this report as a matter of urgency, Minister, or allow the alleged behaviours to continue?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:05): I thank the member for their question and their interest in the matter. I believe the report he is referring to is a corrections cultural review. From the outset I do want to state that our government is committed to keeping the Victorian community safe. Our corrections system is designed to improve community safety and help people turn their lives around. Our facilities and services provide genuine opportunities for people in contact with the justice system to turn their lives around and rehabilitate. Corrections Victoria staff work very hard in a difficult job throughout the year in different circumstances to ensure that our corrections facilities are kept safe and secure.

The review of our corrections system will strengthen the custodial system. The Victorian government announced the review in 2021 to help strengthen the safety, culture and wellbeing of the custodial system for both staff and people in custody. The findings of the review will help us ensure the system is orientated towards turning people's lives around and reducing reoffending. Over 1700 people contributed to the review process.

Nicholas McGowan: On a point of order, President, the minister is clearly reading from a document. I ask that the minister table the document.

The PRESIDENT: There is no point of order.

Enver ERDOGAN: I just wish to thank everyone that participated in that review of the corrections system that Mr Bach referred to. I think many of our stakeholders in the corrections system contributed to that, including the staff, the union, obviously people from the department, and the independent people who come and observe and have oversight of our prison system. They all contributed. In relation to the member's question, I do not have an announcement today about when that report will be released.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:07): I thank the minister. Minister, in the corrections system there are concerns of the rewriting of reports to correct staff, with allegations of drinking at work and other behaviours that obviously are totally inappropriate in the workplace. Will you guarantee, Minister, that all allegations of this nature are formally investigated and any person who speaks out is and will be protected?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:07): I thank the member for his question and interest in our corrections system. As I stated in my substantive, we are carefully considering the final report, but I am not here today to make any announcements. Meaningful cultural change, as everyone would understand, is challenging and requires detailed planning. So in terms of the response, that will require detailed planning.

I am committed to supporting a modern corrections system that is safe, fair and inclusive. We need to do what we can to ensure that we keep people safe and help them to make a positive contribution to the rehabilitation of people in custody. Obviously in due course we will give a comprehensive, clear and robust response to the review's findings and any specific incidents and findings. As I said, all recommendations that come from that report will be addressed in due course. I want to thank the former Victorian equal opportunity and human rights commissioner Kristen Hilton for leading this review by the expert panel into our corrections system, which did identify a number of issues. I also want to thank other expert committee members –

Nicholas McGowan: On a point of order, President, the question was clearly in relation to the protection of certain individuals. The minister is now debating the question. I ask you to bring him to order.

The PRESIDENT: I thought the minister was relevant to the supplementary question. His time has expired as well, so we will move on.

Timber industry

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:08): (34) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Minister, since we were last in this place Japanese paper giant Nippon has announced it is closing its Maryvale mill for white paper production. This mill uses around 80 per cent of the timber logged from Victoria's native forests. This decision, along with VicForests finding it difficult to log within the law and the importance of our native forests in combating climate change and providing clean air, water and habitat for threatened species, highlights once again that there is no excuse to keep logging our precious forests. So I ask again, Minister: will the government end native forest logging in Victoria this year?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:09): I thank Dr Ratnam for her question, and indeed my answer is no different to the answer that I provided on the last occasion, and that is that this government is very much committed to ensuring that we have a managed approach to the situation that we find the timber industry in. We want it to be stabilised, and of course we want to ensure that those that are connected directly and indirectly have the proper supports and the mechanisms available to them so that there is, as I said, a managed approach to the industry.

I have got to say, Dr Ratnam, I am a little bit surprised that you have actually called for the immediate cessation of the timber industry today, in light of the decision of Nippon to shut down the white paper production. I think it is a tad insensitive, to say the least, and I can assure the house that we are working overtime in discussions and negotiations with a whole range of stakeholders to try and ensure that we have got a number of options available for the industry for now and into the future.

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:11): Thank you, Minister, for your response. I am pleased to hear you reference a managed approach and having people at the centre of that decision. I am very happy to talk about sensitivities – sensitivities to people and the need for the transition and also sensitivities to our environment and the detrimental state that it is in. The logging of Victoria's native forests for pulp and paper was always wrong, and it is now completely untenable. The government has failed to plan for the inevitable, and it is the workers, their families and the Latrobe Valley community who are now hurting, let alone the issue that a massive overseas company has reaped the profits from our forests but it is Victorians who will pay for the government's mismanagement of the industry. Having said that, will the government now bring forward its transition plan for workers and the community in light of Nippon's decision?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:12): Again I thank Dr Ratnam for the question. The decision that Nippon has made is in relation to white paper production, and that is one section of the Maryvale mill, not the entire mill, and in fact the majority of workers are in the other brown packaging area. So

in terms of the answer to your question, again my answer is the same. We are very much on the balls of our feet in terms of dealing with the complexities of the timber industry. We are making sure that a whole range of conversations and options and deliberations and negotiations are absolutely underway. I can advise you that it is taking up a significant amount of my time. We are alive to the many issues that are confronting, one, the industry, but in particular the workers and their families.

The PRESIDENT: We have a former member of this chamber in the gallery: Dr Cumming.

Ministers statements: Second Chance Jobs

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:13): I rise to update the house on the good work happening across our corrections system in Victoria to ensure people are kept safe and they can turn their lives around. We know that having a job is essential to supporting people to stay out of prison and reconnect with communities and family. Having meaningful work is important to all of us. It increases our self-worth, enables us to support our families, keeps us connected to people around us and can provide confidence and dignity. That is why I am pleased to speak about Second Chance Jobs.

Vacro and Corrections Victoria are partnering to get people into work as soon as they are released, and I thank them for their efforts. For over 150 years Vacro have been supporting people in the criminal justice system and their families to turn their lives around. Second Chance Jobs helps people become job ready by providing vocational training while they are in custody. That support extends into the community by working with employers to provide job opportunities for people exiting prison. People are provided with assistance for up to a year after they leave prison, because we know that that is the time when they need the most support to help give them the best chance of not reoffending. Employers are lining up to take part in Second Chance Jobs. There are now more than 40 employers signed up to offer jobs to participants.

Not only does the program forecast a net benefit of over \$30 million per year; it is giving people in the criminal justice system a second chance of finding meaningful employment upon release. Keeping the community safe is not just about what happens inside prison; it is about giving people the right support to break the cycle of offending and stay out of prison, which is exactly what this program does and what employment provides.

Corrections system

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:15): (35) My question is again for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, this time, in June 2022 the Legal and Social Issues Committee of this place tabled a comprehensive report into Victoria's criminal justice system. You were a member of that committee. The response was due in September last year and as of today has, again, not been tabled. Since becoming the Minister for Corrections, have you ordered that the government's response to the report be published, and if not, Minister, why not?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:15): I thank the member for their question and their interest in this matter. I will say from the outset that I was a participating member of that committee, and I do recall that it touched upon many different portfolio responsibilities, some of which I am responsible for, but it was across the whole criminal justice system. Mr Bach should know that. But in terms of our government's record in the corrections role or in youth justice, I would like to say that our government is committed to keeping Victorians safe, and I have said many times we are committed to assisting people to break the cycle of violence. Obviously holding offenders to account whilst supporting them to find better pathways for their rehabilitation reduces their risk of reoffending, and that is good for all Victorians. We are investing in people and the infrastructure in our state to keep the corrections system going.

Matthew Bach: On a point of order, President, these are highly meritorious motherhood statements. However, they have nothing whatsoever to do with the question that was asked. Respectfully, I would ask that the minister should come back and actually answer the question.

The PRESIDENT: The minister still has 2 minutes for his answer.

Enver ERDOGAN: Thank you, President. As I stated to Dr Bach's substantive, the findings of the report touch upon a number of portfolios, so if he was more specific about which elements of that report he wants me to respond to, that would assist. Nonetheless, in terms of the criminal justice system, as a new minister, we are always reviewing and making improvements to our system, but we are investing as well in new facilities and in the people that work in our system. We have a new state-of-the-art Western Plains facility. The physical construction has just been completed.

Nicholas McGowan: On a point of order, President, the member is now clearly debating the question. I ask you to direct him to answer the question that was asked.

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

Enver ERDOGAN: I have stated, if the member was listening to my answer, that that report is a comprehensive report. Members in this chamber who were on that committee will understand that the issues that it cuts across are not just my portfolio responsibilities. It cuts across a number of different portfolios. Mr Bach should know that, so maybe he should ask a question that relates to my portfolio instead of just asking a broad question. He has directed it to me, but that report is not just about my portfolio responsibilities.

As I said, our government has invested in our corrections system. We have invested in the infrastructure and facilities. We have invested in the staff. I am pleased to report that the number of people in custody has actually reduced by 17 per cent since March 2020.

Nicholas McGowan: On a point of order, President, the answer is not relevant. I would ask you to direct the member to answer the question.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr McGowan. I have listened closely to Mr Erdogan, and all he has spoken about since your last point of order is this report.

Enver ERDOGAN: Some of the issues that were raised in that report talked about, I guess, government supervision of offenders that are released from our criminal justice system. Our government has invested over \$200 million for community corrections reform to improve supervision of offenders on programs and strengthen rehabilitation through targeted specialist programs since 2016 and 2017.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:19): Thank you, Minister. Will you commit to ensuring that the government's response to the inquiry is tabled prior to any proposed changes being introduced to the Parliament?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:19): I thank the member for their supplementary question and interest in this matter. In terms of the recommendations made to the government, they will be analysed and reviewed in accordance with the standard way with a lot of these reports that come from house committees. In that regard I do not have an announcement about a specific date by which a response will be tabled, but there will be a response. In relation to our work in the corrections space, I have stated that for some of the elements that came out through that inquiry our government is already addressing them. We have invested in the supervision of offenders and in rehabilitation programs. A number of our successive budgets have done so.

Homelessness

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:20): (36) My question is for Minister Blandthorn, representing the Minister for Housing in the other place, and relates to the homelessness sector. Homelessness and housing services across Australia have traditionally been funded through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. However, the agreement ends on 30 June this year, with the October 2022 federal Labor budget ceasing future funding for the sector's equal remuneration order. This represents an effective cut of \$23.6 million to homelessness services in Victoria. The sad result will be a rapid increase in Victorians forced to sleep on Victorian streets or in cars or couch surf. This is a Victorian problem requiring a Victorian solution. My question to the minister is: how will this government bridge this urgent services and funding gap?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:21): Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for that question. It is obviously a question for the Minister for Housing, and I would be very pleased to pass that question on to the Minister for Housing for him to provide a response in line with the prescribed standing orders.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:21): I thank the minister for her response. As the current cost-of-living pressures exacerbate the affordable housing crisis, women over the age of 55 are Victoria's fastest growing cohort of the homeless, so I ask: how is the minister addressing this immediate and urgent short-term need?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:22): Again I am more than happy to pass this question to the Minister for Housing. Obviously the question is in relation to homelessness and is a question in line under the prescribed standing orders for the Minister for Housing. I would say that the minister, I am sure, will be pleased to answer the question and provide you with the details you requested.

Ministers statements: bushfires commemoration

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:22): I rise to acknowledge the recent anniversaries of the Ash Wednesday and the Black Saturday fires, and in doing so I would like to acknowledge the significant impacts of these events on so many Victorians right across the state.

Our uniquely skilled Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) team, made up of staff from across the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Parks Victoria, keep communities safe year round by reducing the risk and impact of bushfires in Victoria's parks and forests and of course right across our public land estate. They also play a crucial role in responding to other emergencies, including the recent flood events.

I had the absolute privilege recently of visiting the staff at our Marysville depot to see firsthand the work they do to keep our communities safe, and I was really grateful to Peter, Chris, Jarrod and Tom, who generously shared their experiences fighting some of the worst fires in Victoria's history and what drives them to continue to do that work to this day. Victoria has a world-leading forest fire management approach, and it was great to hear firsthand from the team about the complex science that informs the work that they do and the innovative use of data to identify areas most at risk.

It was also really great to meet a young group of mostly female trainees who were learning to operate those massive heavy tankers. I am advised that they all successfully passed their training, so a huge congratulations to our next generation of forest firefighters. The teams at DEECA, FFMVic and Parks Victoria are amongst the best in the world at what they do, and I would like to thank them for working with the community and traditional owners to keep all Victorians safe.

Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:24): (37) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, recently a medical specialist came to the aid of a 90-year-old man who had fallen in his home and fractured his femur. The specialist called 000 and requested an ambulance. An ESTA staff member informed him that they would not be dispatching an ambulance and that a nurse or paramedic would phone back later to decide whether an ambulance would be required. After identifying himself as a medical specialist and reiterating the urgency of the situation, he requested to be transferred to a nurse or paramedic. This request was refused, with the explanation that it was ‘not protocol’ and he was transferred to a generic recorded message. Minister, why is this protocol in place, denying an ambulance for an elderly Victorian with a serious injury?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:25): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. At the outset, it is not a protocol that ambulances are not dispatched for people in emergency situations. That is just a blatant falsehood that you have just provided to the house. I have answered similar questions to this in the past. How ESTA works is that the call taker accepts the call, and they are informed by a set of guidelines, protocols and advice which are informed by medical experts, by paramedics and the like. They are regularly updated in response to advice from those experts.

It is very difficult for me to respond to the specifics of your question, because I do not know the detail, but what I can tell you is that it is appropriate to have guidelines and protocols that are informed by medical experts about when ambulances should be dispatched. It is not for me to determine the medical severity of an incident; that is informed by people that know what they are doing in this space. Not every person will have an ambulance sent to them when they call 000 requesting one; that is based on the need and the advice that they are provided. As I said, I am not across the details of that specific case. I can make some inquiries, but I think what I will be able to provide you is that it was handled in accordance with appropriate processes.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): I look forward to receiving that information so I can pass it on. He did write to your colleagues and also the Premier, so perhaps they have the information as well. Minister, the medical specialist in this case was concerned that the recorded message contained generic and potentially inappropriate advice. If a medical specialist has no confidence in the 000 system and is concerned for patient welfare, how can Victorians have confidence they will get the appropriate response from 000 in a medical emergency?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:27): Ms Crozier, the ESTA workforce is one of the most amazing workforces that I have ever come across. They are dedicated every day to getting out of bed and into one of the most challenging workplaces, where they are dealing with helping Victorians who are often experiencing very traumatic circumstances. They are driven to help people. They are a workforce that we have supported significantly in recent times due to impacts of COVID, and that has been well canvassed in this place. This workforce is smashing all of its benchmarks at the moment. They are responding to Victorians.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaelyn SYMES: They are smashing their targets at the moment, absolutely. And when it comes to the medical and clinical decisions, that is not a matter for politicians. That is a matter for the experts that inform the service.

Traffic cameras

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:28): (38) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, which I believe is Minister Shing. During the last term of Parliament there were a very large number of similar cameras installed at intersections

throughout the state. My question for the minister is this: what is the brand and place of origin of those cameras?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:29): Thanks, Mr Limbrick. I am just going to say that in accordance with the standing orders I am very happy to provide that question to the minister in the other place for a substantive answer.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:29): I thank Minister Shing for passing that on. My supplementary question is: could the minister please outline what gives them confidence in the information security of those cameras and how they are managed?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:29): As indicated in the answer to the substantive question, I am very happy to refer that to my colleague in the other place for an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

Ministers statements: renewable energy workforce

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:30): I am pleased to update the chamber on how the Andrews Labor government is delivering skills and jobs for our clean energy future through collaboration and collective impact. Recently I was pleased to join the Premier and the Minister for the State Electricity Commission to announce the upcoming renewable energy skills and workforce forum, bringing together representatives from clean energy employers, unions, training providers, peak bodies, students and traditional owner groups. The forum will be held in the first half of this year to enable cooperation to ensure that we have the training and workforces we need for the thousands of roles the SEC and other clean energy assets will be able to create under Victoria's renewables revolution.

This forum will also lay the groundwork for the establishment of the SEC training excellence centre, which will work hand in glove with our vocational education and training sector to ensure that the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority is able to accredit courses in clean energy. For many existing workers this will mean building on their current trade qualifications, particularly in electrotechnology qualifications. Clean energy will also become a VCE vocational major, which has replaced the vocational certificate of applied learning. This will ensure a strong pathway into these courses post secondary school.

Our nation-leading transition to net zero will be delivered by the SEC and will be supported by our world-class training and skills system. Only the Andrews Labor government will establish a clean, green economy for Victoria with sustainable careers for thousands of Victorians.

Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:31): (39) My question is again to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, 89-year-old June Moehr of Mansfield fell and broke her left shoulder last December. Her son rang 000. He was told a nurse would contact him later as they were busy. Thirty-five minutes later, with no call from a nurse, he called 000 again. This time he was told an ambulance would be sent when one was available. After an hour and 10 minutes the paramedics arrived, and they provided exceptional care to Mrs Moehr. However, they were very surprised to hear how long Mrs Moehr waited, as they had been at the station for the previous 3 hours. The ambulance station was 5 minutes away. Minister, why did 000 wait so long to send an ambulance when there was one ready to go only 5 minutes away and paramedics were, in their words, available.

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:32): I thank Ms Crozier for her question and bringing to the house's attention the case of Mrs Moehr. I am not aware of the details of that case, but I can certainly follow up if you give me a few more details.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): Thank you very much, Minister, for that response. I am sure that Mrs Moehr and her family would appreciate that, because we know that in other instances that have affected Victorians where an ambulance has not arrived we have not had the response from the government to speak to them. I refer to Mr David Edwards from Swan Hill. You know that case only too well, and sadly, his father died. Minister, my supplementary is now –

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: No, no. I am just making some commentary around your response, so thank you. My supplementary, Minister, is that Mrs Moehr ended up being in hospital for five weeks. It was clear that she needed urgent medical attention. Minister, when the health system is in crisis and in such disarray, as it is at the current time and has been over the last few years, why are available ambulances and paramedics sitting idly by whilst vulnerable patients languish in pain?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:34): I have committed to following up the case involving Mrs Moehr of Mansfield, but to go on and then use that as a supplementary to say that there are paramedics sitting idle and not responding to –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Generally. I said I would respond to Mrs Moehr, but to use that to then make a broad statement about Victorians not being responded to by our hardworking paramedics is just not an inference you can draw from the one case that I have said I would follow up for you.

Short-stay accommodation

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:34): (40) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Right now we are in the middle of a housing crisis, and thousands of properties across Victoria are sitting empty. Rather than giving a secure home to a family or an essential worker, short-stay properties are accumulating wealth for investors because they can make double the rent by leasing their second, third, fourth or 50th property, unregulated, through platforms like Airbnb. In my region of Western Victoria the Surf Coast shire has a vacancy rate below 1 per cent. If you are looking for a long-term rental today in Apollo Bay, there are only two properties listed on realestate.com. As the rental crisis worsens, will the government follow through on their commitment to urgently review our weak short-stay regulations?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:35): I thank Ms Mansfield for her question and her interest in a matter that is directed to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. As is the practice of this place, I will take that question on notice and seek a response from the minister, as set out in our standing orders.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:36): Thank you for that response. The legislation that this government previously passed was solely to regulate unruly parties in short-stay properties. In the midst of a rental crisis, the current regulations do nothing to support renters in search of a home. Without secure housing, hospitality businesses, farms and essential services like health and education are unable to attract workers. People in our community are being displaced, and homelessness is rising. Right now investors with multiple properties are able to rent out their secondary homes as short stays for as little or as long as they like. Minister, will you regulate a 90-day cap on the number of nights a year that a property can be rented out as a short stay to incentivise property owners to make their secondary homes available as long-term rentals?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:36): I thank Ms Mansfield for her supplementary question directed to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. As is the practice in this place, I will make sure that question is taken on notice and seek a response from him in due course.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:37): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is delivering on our commitment to the Victorian people to reintroduce important child protection legislation. Today in the other place we are introducing the Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023. Over the past three state budgets, Victorian children and families have accessed more support services through a \$2.8 billion investment in the child protection and family services system, and since 2018 the government has invested over \$160 million of new investment to implement Wungurilwil Gagapduir and its nation-leading initiatives. But we know we must do more and, introduced today, this bill makes important changes to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to work to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care.

Last week, while some people were running the numbers for Aston preselection, I was delighted to be meeting with people such as Aunty Muriel Bamblett of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Djirra and many others to discuss ways to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in care and to discuss ways to support the whole family with family services. Today's bill has been welcomed by Aboriginal stakeholders. Karen Heap from the alliance said that:

The new laws are a first in Australia – they help keep Aboriginal children with their families by enshrining Aboriginal self-determination in child and family services.

Aunty Muriel Bamblett of VACCA said:

The proposed Bill enables us to not just stop the cycle of higher rates of Aboriginal child removal, it will also help address the cycle of family violence. Strengthening the whole family is the only way forward.

Last sitting week I updated this chamber on the important reforms this bill will make to the child protection system, and Dr Bach referred to my statement as idiotic. Well, on this side of the house we do not see reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care as idiotic; we see it as an important duty and one that we take seriously. I urge those opposite and all in this chamber to support the bill when it is introduced in this house so that we can work together to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:39): As far as today's questions go, Minister Erdogan is going to get Ms Mansfield a written response for her substantive and supplementary questions for the Minister for Consumer Affairs in line with the standing orders; similarly, Minister Shing for Mr Limbrick, both substantive and supplementary, for road safety; and Minister Blandthorn for Mr Ettershank, for housing as well, the substantive and supplementary questions. I ask Minister Erdogan, for Dr Bach's second question, the substantive question, to get a written response in line with the standing orders. Minister Symes has offered Ms Crozier, depending on some more information –

Jaclyn Symes: President, it has just been brought to my attention that the correspondence from Ms Crozier's first question arrived in my office on Friday. I will respond to that correspondence.

Georgie Crozier: Thank you. I appreciate that. And the second question?

The PRESIDENT: I was actually referring to the substantive answer to the second question from Ms Crozier. Is that what you are referring to?

Georgie Crozier: President, if I may, I have asked my colleague Ms McLeish to provide the details, and I will forward them to Minister Symes.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you for sorting that out between yourselves, which makes my life so much easier.

Questions on notice

Answers

The PRESIDENT (12:41): I have got a reinstatement of some questions on notice. I received a written request from Mr Davis seeking the reinstatement of questions on notice. I have reviewed the responses and order that questions on notice 1 to 3 be reinstated in full as the responses do not address the time frame of the information sought by Mr Davis.

Constituency questions

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:41): (24) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Rochester was heavily impacted by last October's devastating flood, the impact of which continues today. The number one issue the community is currently facing is a deterioration of residents' mental health, and far too many people are being left to suffer due to a lack of qualified mental health practitioners in the region. I have been advised that currently those in need are having to be referred to a waiting list just to attend an initial consult with a mental health practitioner. The Rochester flood event was described to me as having impacted 90 per cent of Rochester homes and 100 per cent of Rochester's people. The mental health of the collective community is on a knife edge. Will the minister ensure additional mental health professionals are immediately provided to the Rochester community to provide the mental health services the residents of this community so desperately need?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:42): (25) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Two hundred dedicated volunteers make up Wombat Forestcare. Their collective knowledge has led to important protections in the region, including discovery of one of the rarest plants in the world as well as endangered species such as the mountain skink. Despite extreme weather events that uprooted thousands of trees throughout the Macedon Ranges, the group has witnessed additional clearing along Babbington Hill, Osborne Road and alongside Wombat Creek, an important water supply. Whilst clearing to reduce fire risk is completely legal, it is reportedly the larger logs that are removed and the tinder that is left behind. There are currently two salvage operations being carried out in Wombat State Forest and the Cobaw State Forest, and my constituents would like to know when the minister will provide details of where salvage timber ends up.

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (26) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and the news today is that Corey Hannett, the major general or controller or whatever title you want to give him, has resigned. A number of projects in my electorate, including the Metro Tunnel – almost \$3 billion over budget – and the level crossing removal program, on which the full costs have never, ever been released, with massive blowouts, he has oversighted, with blowout after blowout after blowout that has affected directly my electorate. There is the sky rail and the level crossing removal that has been so much in the news at Surrey Hills and Mont Albert in the recent period. The question I am asking is: is it a fact that he has been pushed, and will the government release a full statement on the cost blowouts on the Metro and the level crossings in my electorate which have been very much a part of his failure? I make it clear Devlin is no better. The others are no better either – *(Time expired)*

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:44): (27) My constituency question is for the minister representing the Minister for Housing. I have spoken to some residents at Park Towers public housing estate in South Melbourne, which is a special, tight-knit community, but there are some residents there feeling increasingly unsafe, neglected and ignored by the department. On Friday I met

with residents who have been pushing to improve their community and have been advocating for a safe, dignified place to call home for decades. The residents were clear: things are bad. They regularly witness physical assaults, and neighbours are struggling with severe addiction and mental health crises on occasion. Dumped rubbish is frequent in common areas and they desperately need more funding for wellbeing checks, security, cleaning and maintenance. Horrifyingly, a fire last December left some in doubt that the smoke detectors in the tower were even functional. These residents' requests are not radical. They want to live somewhere that is safe, clean and supported. Minister, will you step up maintenance, fire safety and security for the Park Towers community, or at the very least advise them why their wellbeing is not currently a priority for the government?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:45): (28) My constituency question is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples in the other place, and it is on behalf of a respected Kurnai elder and Gippslander, Mrs Cheryl Drayton. Closing the gap targets are very, very important; not only does Victoria need to look at a broad vision, but they also need real solutions from real people. Mrs Drayton would like the minister for First Peoples to actually come to Gippsland to listen to her and others with on-the-ground solutions for issues like education, health and the justice system. Her concern is that too often the minister stays in Melbourne and listens to Melbourne-based views, where we really need her to come to Gippsland and have regular meetings with local elders and with people with content knowledge for solutions in our region.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:46): (29) My constituency question is to the minister representing the Minister for Planning. Two important decisions in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region were pushed back till after the election by the Minister for Planning: the decision on the future of the Preston Market and the decision on the proposed quarry in Wallan and Beveridge. When is the minister finally going to hand down the decisions, and will the minister agree to meet with affected community groups?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:47): (30) My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The duplication of the Western Highway between Ararat and Buangor has dragged on with a noticeable lack of progress. My understanding is that the previous planning permit lapsed and a new one was required, with a cultural heritage study needed for the road construction to progress. My question to the minister is: when can we expect to see that cultural heritage study completed?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McArthur (Western Victoria) (12:48): (31) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. Parks Victoria has recently closed some of the best and most historic walking tracks in the Grampians, including Briggs Bluff, Dellys Dell, Mount Difficult and Mount Rosea. Wild camping and scrambling across rocks has also been banned. These walks are in terrific condition, but their closure and the camping ban forced tourists to the \$33 million Grampians Peaks Trail at a cost of nearly \$50 a night. Can the minister confirm that the closure and banning of these traditional walking paths and activities has got more to do with reducing the management needs of the park and directing people to government money-making options and say whether these changes represent the blueprint for the demise of other national parks in Victoria.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nicholas McGowan (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (32) My question is to the Minister for Housing. I had the good fortune yesterday to visit the independent living units at St Vincent's Care Services in Eltham. They received news last week that St Vincent's Care will begin a process of further

decommissioning of the residents' village. Some 52 people have been advised that by the end of this year, that is in the next 10 months, they will be required to leave their homes and find a home elsewhere. This issue is particularly concerning because a large number of those 52 people speak Arabic, not just English. I am most concerned, as they are, that they will be turfed out of their homes; they will have nowhere to go. These are refugees from Syria and Iraq and some Australian-born citizens, and I would like to bring to the house's attention the fact that, should these people be tossed out and not given appropriate services, there will be very dire consequences for the people concerned.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (33) My question is for the Minister for Police in the other place. Will he join me and visit Glen Waverley police station in order to see firsthand why a significant upgrade is needed there? This is an old facility that supports over 160 fabulous staff. It is in need of a significant upgrade. I was pleased before the last election that the then Shadow Minister for Police made a pledge of some \$40 million, and I think some funding in that broad ballpark would be necessary to do what is required in order to get this facility up to speed to serve of course the fantastic staff who work there and then of course the broader community. Now, sadly that was not matched at that time by the government. Well, the election has been and gone; it would be great now to work with the minister in order to get the good members of Victoria Police in Glen Waverley and more broadly then the community in Glen Waverley a facility that is up to scratch, a facility that is desperately needed.

Bills

Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Health Services Performance Transparency and Accountability) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to require the reporting of data relating to the performance of health services and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Georgie CROZIER: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Sustainable Forests (Timber) Amendment (End Native Forest Logging) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:52): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004 to prohibit the logging of native forests, to repeal the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996 and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Samantha RATNAM: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order of 14 February 2023 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Birrarung Park.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notices pursuant to section 32(3) in relation to –

Statutory Rule No. 171/2021 (*Gazette G7, 16 February 2023*).

Statutory Rule No. 120/2022 (*Gazette G5, 2 February 2023*).

Ombudsman – Good Practice Guide: Complaint handling in a crisis, February 2023 (*released on 16 February 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the –

Benalla Planning Scheme – Amendment C44.

Boroondara Planning Scheme – Amendment C389.

Brimbank Planning Scheme – Amendment C236.

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme – Amendment C277.

Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme – Amendment C240.

Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme – Amendment C114.

Kingston Planning Scheme – Amendment C211.

Moorabool Planning Scheme – Amendment C100.

Moreland Planning Scheme – Amendment C225.

Stonnington Planning Scheme – Amendment C328.

Statutory Rules under the Road Safety Act 1986 – Nos. 7, 8 and 9.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule No. 97/2022.

Legislative Instruments and related documents under section 16B in respect of the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 –

Gas Distribution System Code of Practice (Unaccounted for Gas Benchmarks) Amendment 2022.

Electricity Distribution Code of Practice (Distributor Reporting Obligations) Amendment 2022.

Production of documents

Health workforce

The Clerk: I present a letter from the Attorney-General dated 16 February 2023 in response to a resolution of the Council on 8 February 2023 relating to staff shortages in the public health system. The letter states that the date in the production of documents order does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 22 February 2023:

- (1) order of the day 1, second reading of the Road Safety Amendment (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2023;
- (2) notice of motion 13 standing in Georgie Crozier's name referring matters relating to the state's preparedness for and response to Victoria's major flooding event of October 2022 to the Environment and Planning Committee;
- (3) notice of motion 12 standing in David Limbrick's name referring matters relating to land transfer duty fees to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee;
- (4) notice of motion given this day by David Limbrick referring matters relating to drug harm reduction to the Legal and Social Issues Committee;
- (5) order of the day 7, resumption of debate on a motion moved by Samantha Ratnam relating to the group voting system;
- (6) order of the day 1, listed for a future day, resumption of debate on the second reading of the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Raise the Age) Bill 2022;

and the resumption of debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech be postponed until Thursday 23 February 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements**Templestowe Heights Primary School**

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:00): I rise to update the house on a recent visit that I attended at a fantastic public school in my region, Templestowe Heights Primary School. I was really pleased to attend and visit the school and see our newest and littlest Victorians moving on up from kindergarten to start their first year at primary school, in grade prep. And to celebrate this important milestone I was fortunate enough to be able to hand each and every prep student a fantastic prep bag full of educational and engaging resources. The theme for this year's prep bags is 'Moving on up', and it celebrates the transition for our littlest Victorians from kindergarten to school. Amongst the fantastic and engaging resources that are contained within that bag are some books: *Bedtime Sorted!* by Jimmy Rees, *Stellarphant* by James Foley, *The Biscuit Maker* by Sue Lawson, *What Colour is the Sea* by Katie Stewart and *The Two-hearted Numbat* by Ezekiel and Ambelin Kwaymullina. It was a fantastic visit to the school, and I was also fortunate enough to see the recently and newly completed state-of-the-art science, technology, arts and maths building and upgraded library and administration and outdoor areas, which was made entirely possible thanks to and courtesy of the Andrews Labor government investment of \$13 million.

Also of course, most importantly, whenever I go and do these fantastic prep visits we always get the frisbee out of the prep bag and make sure that students give their frisbee a test drive, because as we know, when you are little it is really important to make sure you learn through play. So it was really good to see the kids enjoying not only the educational resources but having a play with the frisbees on the oval as well.

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:02): Despite what the government says, we do know that Victoria's health system remains in crisis, and disgracefully, the government refused to release the Victorian Agency for Health Information data when they should have. That was the data between –

David Davis: A cover-up.

Georgie CROZIER: An absolute cover-up, Mr Davis. It was the last quarter – October, November and December – data that was released just a few days ago. In fact when they did finally release it just 15 minutes before the minister was to stand up and spruik what she was going to spruik, it was very clear when we analysed that that the ambulance code 0 wait times had increased but there were fewer call-outs. In fact for the most serious and life-threatening cases those code 0 incidents had increased to more than 9½ minutes over that quarter. Every second counts. And when you are waiting minutes and minutes for a call-out and these ongoing failures, which are simply unacceptable, continue to occur, you know that something is wrong. And of course we had reports of the Children’s Hospital just a few days ago, again from the data, that showed incredibly that 890 children were added to the surgery waitlist in the last year, and the delays are getting longer and longer. This is completely unacceptable.

Türkiye and Syria earthquakes

Adem SOMYUREK (Northern Metropolitan) (13:03): I rise to express my sorrow for the loss of 47,000 lives – and unfortunately that is continuing to rise – and the displacement of millions of people due to two devastating earthquakes that struck Türkiye on 6 February 2023. I send my deep condolences to the family and friends who have lost loved ones from the quakes. The tragic and shocking loss of life in Türkiye is difficult for us to comprehend, being so far away. I struggle to find words that can truly do justice to the depth of human suffering that this disaster has wrought and that we have been witnessing on a daily basis on our TV screens and on social media for the past few weeks. This quake has caused enormous distress in my new electorate of Northern Metropolitan, which contains the largest Turkish community in the Australian diaspora. My message to the Victorian Turkish community is that the Victorian Parliament and the people of Victoria stand in solidarity with you.

The earthquake has also been devastating for the people of northern Syria, who have had to endure decades of being bombed by the Assad regime, and having escaped Assad’s bombing they went to Türkiye for sanctuary and have been devastated again. I would urge the federal government to continue with support to the international efforts to assist the people of Türkiye and the civilian population of the earthquake-affected non-regime-controlled areas of Syria.

Türkiye and Syria earthquakes

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (13:05): More sad news overnight with the report of two further earthquakes in Türkiye, compounding the severe impacts of the severe and serious and devastating earthquakes that the honourable member just mentioned here. 47,000 – a devastating loss of life, and I want to echo the thoughts and sympathies of others and add my name to theirs with both the victims of this tragedy overseas but also with the diaspora community here in Victoria, who have been deeply affected.

We know that in the darkest of times the generosity of the community does shine through. Our governments have done what is required. There has been an initial allocation from the Australian government. There has been a donation from the Victorian government to the relief efforts. It is the contribution from the community that often underscores and underlines our faith in the human spirit, and on Sunday I had the privilege of joining Minister Suleyman and my colleague Mr Berger at Tulum restaurant in Balaclava, which was hosting a community fundraising barbecue to support relief efforts on the ground in Türkiye. For those who know Carlisle Street, it was transformed by the smells of charcoal barbecue and sticky sweet treats, but the community spirit of those there to show their support was palpable. The queues kept growing and growing for people wanting to make a donation, and the strength of the local response to this initiative spoke volumes about the people who I represent in Southern Metropolitan and reinforced Victoria’s values – that locals come together to help those in need no matter how near or far they are.

Walk for Dementia

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:07): On Sunday 12 February I was honoured to join Kyabram's Mick Simpson and many others for his latest Walk for Dementia event at the Victoria Park Lake in Shepparton to raise community awareness of dementia. Despite being diagnosed with dementia in 2019, Mick works to raise awareness of dementia through community walks and, in partnership with the Kyabram Community & Learning Centre, provides great assistance to those living with dementia through the Kyabram and district dementia support group. As well as supporting the group, funds raised by Mick also support research into the condition. Last year Mick walked from Kyabram to the steps of state Parliament, raising over \$5600 for the cause. Mick Simpson is a local champion of his community, selflessly walking many kilometres to help others impacted by this terrible condition. I want to publicly congratulate and thank Mick for his bravery and determination to help other sufferers, and I would also like to thank the wonderful staff and volunteers at the Kyabram Community & Learning Centre for their ongoing support of Mick and his campaign.

Goulburn Valley Pride

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:08): On Saturday 11 February I was delighted to attend Goulburn Valley Pride's inaugural Pride ball held at the Woolshed in Kialla, a wonderful night that attracted over 150 guests. GV Pride is a fantastic organisation that provides valuable support and advocacy to the LGBTQI+ communities in the Goulburn Valley and surrounding region. Congratulations and thank you to GV Pride for hosting such a fantastic event, and I look forward to attending next year.

Behrouz Boochani

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (13:08): Over the last month Kurdish journalist and writer Behrouz Boochani has been visiting Australia advocating against Australia's punishment of people seeking asylum and refuge. I had the privilege of hearing him speak at the Kurdish democratic community centre in my electorate. Behrouz Boochani describes himself first as a writer, but his activism on the Kurdish struggle is now inextricably linked to his life and work. He spoke about how the Kurds continue to be subjected to assimilation and their continued struggle for cultural survival. We also spoke and acknowledged the devastation that the Kurdish, Syrian and Turkish people have experienced in the wake of earthquakes and shared their heartbreak, knowing that marginalised groups were likely to suffer even more gravely. He shared his reflections on the plight of thousands like him who sought asylum in Australia only to be met with the horrors of indefinite detention. At the time of his visit nearly 30,000 people were still waiting for the new Labor government to grant them permanent protection. The week after he visited Parliament, Labor finally acted. I thank the minister for immigration for his care and commitment in fulfilling this promise.

While nothing can console the loss of life and years and the pain that people like Behrouz have endured, I thank him for his advocacy. His bravery politicised people like me, and we tried to use every word he was able to broadcast from Manus Island to fight for political change in Australia. While we know that change is too slow, too late and not enough for the thousands of lives that our immigration policies have destroyed, people like Behrouz Boochani have changed Australia forever and for the better, and for that we are grateful.

International Mother Language Day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:10): Today is International Mother Language Day, a day that celebrates the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity in our multicultural communities. Language is more than just a way of communicating with one another; it is also the main method of carrying out our traditions, values and cultural identities. In the case of my family, my father was born on the island of Lemnos in Greece, migrating to Uruguay when he was around 12 months old, later migrating with the family to Australia, speaking Spanish and Greek. His journey was like

many others to Australia, and speaking his mother language was a way for him to stay connected to his culture and family and pass down the culture to his children.

This year's theme of International Mother Language Day is multicultural education, focusing on starting a discussion on the greater need for multilingual education, particularly in the mother tongue of our local communities. This not only would help to unite communities together but has the potential to transform education in an increasingly global world and revitalise languages at risk of extinction. Children should be allowed to freely showcase their language and culture in their schools, and I know schools in my community encourage students to celebrate today.

The significance of celebrating International Mother Language Day is to remind all that intercultural communication and cultural diversity are our greatest strength here in Victoria. We must preserve and promote the diverse cultures, languages and traditions that make our country and our state so unique and special. It is essential to celebrate cultural backgrounds and celebrate languages as a pivotal part of our successful multicultural society.

Federation University

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:11): My members statement is about lifelong learning and the importance of it. Federation University in Gippsland provides undergraduate courses, postgraduate degrees and a great range to serve our community, but the campus certainly had to weather the COVID shutdowns and find innovative ways to still create courses and deliver them.

Master of business administration students and their convenors celebrated last week, and indeed it shows the diversity and the importance of lifelong learning and the passion that our Gippslanders hold for their individual passions. Three in particular I would like to mention. Three participants shared their capstone projects. Rhonda Abotomey investigated organisation demand for post-traumatic growth resources, and I had an education on that one myself. Jen Smith's report investigated a Gippsland agricultural centre for shared R and D and education – an amazing young woman that we will see more of in the future. And the principal of Lowanna College in Moe, Adam Hogan, explored factors influencing pathways to principal leadership in state schools, an incredibly relevant and important topic in education about growing future leaders. My congratulations to all the graduates and their dedicated advisers.

Medicinal Cannabis Awareness Week

David ETTERSANK (Western Metropolitan) (13:13): This week is Australia's very first Medicinal Cannabis Awareness Week. Aimed at reducing the stigma around this prescription medicine, both in the community and among healthcare professionals, Medicinal Cannabis Awareness Week will include announcements in the fields of training and research and of course the introduction of a bill from Legalise Cannabis Victoria to address the unfair driving laws that apply to medicinal cannabis patients. Medicinal cannabis was legalised in Victoria seven years ago, but still patients are discriminated against, refused access and forced to pay exorbitant prices for a legitimate medicine. This has to change. Where other medical options have failed, medicinal cannabis has provided life-changing relief for people suffering severe muscle spasms or severe pain resulting from multiple sclerosis; relief for people with severe pain, nausea, vomiting or wasting arising from cancer or HIV; and relief from severe epilepsy, debilitating chronic pain, insomnia and endometriosis. It is about being well, not high. It is time to stop the stigma and support patients. It is about the right to drive unimpaired. Being well or being allowed to drive – that should not be the choice. It is about the right to live and function again in Australian society.

Ballarat U3A

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (13:14): I was pleased to recently attend the Ballarat U3A philosophy class as a guest speaker. I was so impressed with the engagement and the level of interaction from members. We spoke about a broad range of political issues and the philosophy that was underpinning them. Every single member of the group was warm, kind, very considered in their

questioning and respectful, and showed great insight. I want to publicly recognise the philosophy class of Ballarat U3A and the great work that they do. Thank you for having me along, and thank you for the valuable service that you provide to the community.

Moore Street, Footscray, truck curfew

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:15): Residents of Footscray were notified in 2015 that new night and weekend curfews on Moore Street would be introduced for trucks and road trains, but eight years on this community is still facing significant noise and environmental pollution, disrupted sleep and impacted physical and mental wellbeing from highly frequent truck traffic. While the Andrews government promised that there will be a complete truck ban following the completion of the West Gate Tunnel, which is now overdue, Footscray community organisers and residents are telling us repeatedly that they cannot keep waiting, and I do not blame them.

I asked Minister Horne to explain the government's decision to provide truck exemptions to bypass the West Gate Bridge without consulting or notifying residents and how freight such as concrete casings, originally meant to be on rail, is instead being delivered on road trains along Moore Street, apparently unchecked. Over 670 community members have signed a petition calling on Melissa Horne, Minister for Roads and Road Safety and Minister for Ports and Freight, to meaningfully restore the 2015 Footscray truck curfew. I stand with them in urging the government to act swiftly on the following: firstly, to restore, monitor and enforce – importantly – the 2015 night and weekend curfews for Moore Street without exemptions; and secondly, to monitor the health and environmental impacts of this heavy, frequent truck movement in regard to both the exhaust and sound pollution that is impacting families and local residents.

Ron Sutherland

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:17): Today I want to draw the house's attention to my friend and good Liberal Party colleague Ron Sutherland, who died last year in May. I am neglectful that I have not spoken about him and his huge contribution. He was a Liberal Party member from 1972; married to Kay, who is also a member for that period – they were married for 65 years; a much-loved father of Karen, Andrew, Paul and Stuart; and a grandfather and great-grandfather many times over. He started as a boilermaker then went on to occupational health and safety for a number of insurance companies, but I want to particularly draw attention to his huge contribution to the Oakleigh electorate and region and also his huge contribution to the Liberal Party. He was one of those people, an absolute salt-of-the-earth person, who could organise and could make sure that things happened – who made sure indeed when campaigns were being run that things went smoothly. He was a person who could also give good and sage advice on a range of different items. He particularly, for example, built A-frames for us as Liberals in the area and did that in his own workshop and could turn them out at a huge pace when required. He will be remembered by Oakleigh and particularly Liberal Party and other members of the community in Oakleigh, and he will be remembered very heavily of course by Kay and her family. I deeply regret Ron's passing, and I am a person who learned a lot from him.

Türkiye and Syria earthquakes

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:19): I rise to deliver a members statement on the humanitarian tragedy occurring in Türkiye and Syria. The loss of life and displacement is hard to fathom. The latest figures reveal that over 47,000 people have perished, more than 100,000 others have been injured and over 3 million people have been displaced. I wish to put on record my support for the funding both the Australian government and the Victorian government have contributed towards the relief efforts.

What is inspiring to me is the work being done locally in the northern suburbs to support the relief effort. Communities are coming together to send off clothes, blankets, baby formula and other items to their home countries. I want to particularly acknowledge my friends at the Australian Turkish Friendship Association, who I was with at much happier times at the start of the year in my electorate

to welcome new international students to Australia. The work they have been doing to support their community is incredible, and I want to acknowledge particularly Ali Sahin, Murat Sahin and Baris Duzova. Over the weekend I visited them at their stall at Greenvale shopping centre, where they briefed me on their efforts. They held that stall to fundraise but also to help community members to get in touch with agencies and contact families back home.

I was also privileged to attend a fundraising dinner in Epping on Sunday hosted jointly by the Australian Muslim Business Council, UID Melbourne and the Australian Turkish Institute. It was a terrific event, where I was joined by my parliamentary colleagues Trung Luu and Matthew Guy, and I want to pay particular tribute to Abdullah Altintop, who put on the event. The Northern Metro has a large Turkish diaspora, and I wish to offer my support for that community.

Ash Wednesday commemoration

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:20): I rise to thank those who gathered at the Aireys Inlet community hall last Thursday to commemorate 40 years since Ash Wednesday. My Polwarth colleague Richard Riordan and I were humbled to be the sole parliamentary representatives present. In 1983 lives were united by the searing fires that screamed across the state and South Australia, taking 76 lives. It remains a day so many remember, for how could they forget the fear, the ferocity, the unknown, the endless sirens, the billowing smoke, the horizon unseeable in the drifts of ash and blackness, the dry heat, the roar of the wind, the silence of the devastation left behind, the eeriness of scorched earth, the mangled iron sheeting, the shattered dreams and lost memories?

Lessons have been learned from that day, but we all live in hope that Victoria can do better. We must do better, as fire in this sunburnt country will always be with us. Roadsides must be cleared of 6-foot-high vegetation instead of acting like candlewicks directing the inferno. Power distribution and transmission lines, where possible, must go underground. Fuel reduction burns must sensitively reduce the fire risk. Thank you to those who united last week, and thank you to those CFA volunteers who stoically gather weekly in readiness for the next plume of smoke.

Sitting suspended 1:22 pm until 2:05 pm.

Address to Parliament

Governor's speech

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed on motion of Michael Galea:

That this house agrees to the following address to the Governor in reply to the Governor's opening speech:

GOVERNOR

We, the Legislative Council of Victoria assembled in Parliament, express our loyalty to Australia and the people of Victoria, and thank you for the speech which you have made to the Parliament.

We declare that we will faithfully carry out the important duties entrusted to us by the people of Victoria, to advance the best interests of all sections of the community.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:05): I want to firstly pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, in my address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land. One of the key principles of this Andrews Labor government is our commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and our support of voice, treaty and truth.

The road to self-determination and justice has been a long, long time coming, and as a proud Aboriginal woman it fills me with hope that the Andrews Labor government made Victoria the first jurisdiction to commit to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* in full, and we are working to achieve this every day. I am keen to continue my work in this Parliament to progress forward on the delivery of our treaties in Victoria as well as achieving outcomes that improve the lives of First Nations people.

I am grateful to be returned to this place as a member for the Northern Metropolitan Region and as a member of the Andrews Labor government. Victorians voted comprehensively for a third term of this government because of our track record on delivering on our promises and our ambitious, progressive agenda, which we have committed to seeing through.

One of the most exciting aspects of this government's agenda is the news that the SEC is back. With the cost of living rising and higher energy prices, action is needed to push down electricity prices. The SEC will put the power back in the hands of Victorians. Even more exciting is that it will be 100 per cent powered by renewable energy, helping to reduce emissions and tackle climate change. Make no mistake: our renewable energy target of 95 per cent by 2035 is world leading. You will struggle to find a jurisdiction in the world that is decarbonising faster than Victoria. With our emissions reduction target of 75 to 80 per cent by 2035, this builds on our commitment to net zero emissions by 2045.

One hundred neighbourhood batteries will also be installed across Victoria to create localised energy storage, including many in my community in Melbourne's northern suburbs. I know from my conversations within my community that climate change is the single-biggest issue of our time, and to be part of a government that is committed to taking action is heartening, in no small part thanks to the tireless efforts of Minister D'Ambrosio, who fights every day to make Victoria a global leader in climate action.

Locally in the northern suburbs the Andrews Labor government is committed to investing in education. We are upgrading local schools, like the \$8.5 million for Carlton North Primary and \$5.3 million for Merri Creek Primary. We are supporting early childhood education by investing almost \$5 billion over this decade into the sector as well as making kinder free for three- and four-year-olds. For families, free kinder means more choice, more flexibility and more money saved.

Our Big Build will be a game changer for how we travel around our regions and our state. The upcoming completion of the Metro Tunnel a full year ahead of schedule will mean more trains more often and will open up extra capacity on the Upfield and Craigieburn lines. It will create five new stations, making the Royal Melbourne Hospital and Melbourne University accessible by train.

The Andrews Labor government has committed to removing eight level crossings in Brunswick, which will transform the community, reducing congestion and improving travel times whilst creating thousands of jobs. These level crossing removals will create four MCGs worth of open space and a dedicated bike path to the city. This will be a huge change for the area, and I will ensure that the community is properly consulted so that this project can meet the demands and needs of as many people as possible. I have in fact moved my electorate office right next to Jewell station on the Upfield line to be right in the heart of the community where this happens.

These are just a few of the many projects we are delivering for our state. Our commitment to building the Suburban Rail Loop and airport rail as well as reforming the bus network in the northern suburbs will get cars off roads and get people to where they need to be faster.

As the last few years have highlighted, there is nothing more important than investing in our health system. The Andrews Labor government will fund the biggest hospital infrastructure project in Australia's history – right up the road in Parkville – by building the new Royal Melbourne and Royal Women's hospitals. Once completed the project will dramatically increase capacity in the emergency, critical care and birthing departments, as well as providing more elective surgery for Victorians. The government will continue its focus on women's health by creating 20 new women's health clinics at public hospitals and more sexual and reproductive health hubs across Victoria. The Andrews Labor government will also work with Aboriginal health organisations to deliver the first-ever dedicated Aboriginal-led women's health clinic.

Having grown up in unstable housing, my lived experience provides a foundation for my work as the Parliamentary Secretary for Housing. This state government's landmark Big Housing Build – the biggest investment in social and affordable housing by any state or territory – is historic in every sense.

This is because only Labor governments recognise that having a safe and secure place to call home gives people a solid foundation to thrive. And we actually take action for it, because merely talking about problems is not the Labor way. Every new social and affordable home built through our government's investment will provide a place to call home to a family in need. This investment also puts downward pressure on overall rental prices in the private market and improves housing affordability; that is what our Big Housing Build is doing. And what about the Labor government's tripling of the size of the Homebuyer Fund shared equity scheme and support for build-to-rent models? Look, there is still so much that is happening and there is still work to be done, and I will strive to do justice to my role in that work as Parliamentary Secretary for Housing.

Volunteering is something that I have done my whole life, whether it be in health organisations like Merri Health and Women's Health Victoria; whether it be in my activism for climate action, which has taken me all over the world; whether it be in climate and community organisations like 3KND radio; or whether it be not-for-profits like the Victorian Council of Social Service and the Centre for Australian Progress. I know all too well the important and crucial role volunteers play in making a community and in building a kinder, more inclusive and more accepting society, and the Andrews Labor government has a central role to play in fostering, in promoting and in rejuvenating the spirit of volunteerism in this state. I am excited to contribute to that as the Parliamentary Secretary for Volunteers.

Across my electorate of the Northern Metropolitan Region we have had a lot of new members join us in this 60th Parliament. Throughout the past few months I have been working closely with my new Northern Metro neighbour Enver Erdogan. Congratulations to him on his appointment as the Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support. Enver and I are just two of the five incredible candidates who made up the Labor North Metro ticket. Susie Byers, Chloe Gaul and Ramy Aljalil are amazing activists, who all in their own ways will continue to organise and deliver for our northern suburbs community.

I was also delighted to welcome the new members of Parliament in my region in the other place, Anthony Cianflone, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Iwan Walters and Nathan Lambert. They all have so much to offer, and I cannot wait to work with all of them to deliver for our beloved communities.

Sadly, despite our incredible track record on progressive reform, Labor was unsuccessful in the inner-city parts of my electorate. Going forward, Labor will continue to deliver for the inner north and the communities that rely on good governments. I am going to give a shout-out to the incredible campaigns of Labor candidates who put their hands up to represent our community. Mike Williams is the hardest working candidate I have ever met. Every member of this place can learn from Mike's passion for campaigning and care for the Brunswick community. He knocked on more doors than I have ever seen to talk about his vision for Brunswick. Launching your campaign alongside Minister D'Ambrosio was a really proud moment for me, and I will look back on that fondly in the years to come. I have every faith that your brilliance, tenacity and leadership will take you so far.

I also want to shout out to the unstoppable Evie Thompson from the Brunswick campaign. Your work ethic and organising ability was unrivalled by anyone across the state. I am inspired by your passion for filling up your doorknocking map and jumping in to save me when my German language skills were clearly lacking. Good luck making your knowledge of German even sharper to help me out in four years time. Also to my new bestie Juan Munoz: your calmness and support amongst a sea of stress and anxiety kept us all going throughout the campaign, something I am incredibly grateful for. Every campaign wishes they had a Juan.

In Melbourne Rebecca Thistleton was a voice for fairness, equal opportunity and climate action. Your ability to connect with voters and spread the progressive message of the Andrews Labor government in the uniquely challenging environment of the CBD and surrounds – my gosh, you did an amazing job. In different circumstances and with different preference flows, you might have just won. Members

of the Australian Muslim Social Services Agency community feel like they have got a new friend in you, and so do I. I am sure we will see you in public life in the future.

To James, Talia, Atticus, Dylan, Ngaire, Chris, James and the campaign team, who did a mountain of work, which often goes unnoticed and unrewarded: congratulations to an incredible campaign team. I just am lost for words with your brilliance.

In Richmond Lauren O'Dwyer was subject to some nasty attacks, which created uncertainty and disunity in the Aboriginal community at a time when unity is required more than ever. The impacts of these attacks are still being felt. Aboriginal identity is complex. Someone should never be subject to politically motivated harassment for being true to their story. Campaigning is always better when you are doing it with a sister, and you made me imagine and dream of a more diverse Parliament. Here's to making that happen soon.

I want to personally thank every single Labor volunteer who knocked on a door, did some calls or stood at a polling booth throughout the campaign. It is your work that got me and my colleagues in this place elected and I am always, always grateful for your support. I want to mention one volunteer by name: Peter Andrews. Those in my community might know him as the ALP volunteer who knocked on their door armed with some red flyers and an unassuming grin, promoting the Labor message. I hope that you have taken a well-earned break after the election and expanded your enviable coin collection. We need more people like Peter Andrews in this party.

I do this gig because some good folks get behind me; they stand beside me and sometimes they wipe my tears. They make me laugh more than I ever thought possible, and they are the best possible crew that I could ever imagine. Mum, I spoke about you the last time I did a speech like this, and my thoughts have not changed: you are a warrior. To my besties: you know who you are. How is it that I still have you in my life? You are with me and my bad singing, my entirely lacking tech know-how and my lifelong Beyoncé obsession. I cannot thank you enough.

There are of course other shout-outs that I want to give, in particular to my team in the electorate office. I know I was gone for a little while there, out there talking to our community, and you kept it all going and I am so, so thankful. It is an honour to be able to serve my region in the 60th Parliament. The Andrews Labor government has a commitment to delivering for all Victorians. We are not governing for government's sake, we are getting on with the job of delivering the big projects and big ideas. I am looking forward to being part of the next four years of delivering for the Northern Metropolitan Region and for all Victorians.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (14:20): There have been a range of contributions in response to the Governor's speech, which I think set a path for a significant, progressive, engaged and motivated Parliament across both chambers. To that end I will say that there is much of what I have heard that I do not agree with, and I would not be alone there. I think that everybody here has a series of differences of a philosophical, economic, social and indeed scientific basis, and that informs the approach that we take as a Parliament in bringing together a contest of ideas in the passage and debate of legislation.

What I do want to focus on today with the time that I have available is the content and the substance of the Governor's speech and indeed the framework by which the Andrews government has been returned for a third term. We have seen a number of challenges over the last eight years which have been experienced globally in a range of ways and which include climate change; a move to renewable energy; changing economic circumstances and environments; of course the pandemic and the pressures that that placed upon health and hospital systems not just here in Victoria, not just around Australia but globally; and the contemporary challenges that we face in meeting workforce demands and skills shortages gaps and in providing opportunities for our youngest through to our oldest citizens to participate in everyday life, to become and remain active and included and to retain dignity. This is

in fact a basis for my contribution today, and in particular in referencing the Governor's speech I want to begin with some statistics and some data, a framework with which I often begin my contributions and that often has the impact of having a lot of people turn off. But I do think that it is important that we give a bit of context to where we are at.

At the moment Australians and indeed Victorians are facing significant challenges to the cost of living. We see a cash rate of 3.35 per cent, we see inflation having increased by 8 per cent over the past 12 months to the December 2022 quarter and we also see that there are global pressures on economies everywhere in managing the challenges of industrial, commercial, infrastructure and societal demands over time. We will see challenges continue to develop a force that provides and creates additional pressure on governments and on communities. But the way that this is borne out is about the cost of a grocery shop, the number at the bottom of an electricity bill, the cost of topping up a Myki or indeed the way in which the cost of books, uniforms, TAFE materials or other professional development tools are met through the pay packets and the payments received by individuals around the state, and that is where one of the key drivers of this term, the third Andrews government term, will be directed.

Meeting the cost of living includes initiatives such as capping V/Line fares at metropolitan prices, an initiative which begins very shortly and will cap prices at \$9.20. This is an enormous saving of up to 82 per cent for regional travellers and users of the public transport system. This is a significant equaliser, and when we combine that with the work that has gone in, in record terms, to invest in heavy rail infrastructure and in public transport infrastructure around the state, these are programs which coalesce to alleviate the cost of living and to improve the level of service and connectivity that Victorians can expect and rely upon. In Gippsland, eastern Victoria, we have seen the \$530 million Gippsland rail revival. This is something which has occupied our line for a long period of time now, with construction sites, new platforms, duplication, passing loops and additional access to car parks. This goes alongside the additional services that have been provided along the line and additional train sets which are being deployed as part of an overall network increase.

The cost of a Myki ticket is one thing, the upgrade to rail infrastructure is another, but when it comes to meeting the cost of living as it relates to kindergarten and early childhood development, nothing could be more important, to my mind, in encouraging uptake and encouraging opportunity than the Best Start, Best Life program. Beginning as we did with the rollout of universal access to three-year-old kinder in South Gippsland shire, amongst a number of others, it was a very proud moment indeed to join then education and early childhood minister James Merlino, the former Deputy Premier of Victoria, to head along to hear that just about 90 per cent uptake had been achieved in South Gippsland because of the offering of universal access to three-year-old kinder. Beginning with 10 hours and scaling up to 15 hours per week, not only was this a game changer for our littlest Victorians in seeking to expand their horizons through play-based learning, improving their opportunities to develop motor skills, communication skills and indeed the way in which they make their way in the world as a precursor to beginning school, but to see that rolled out across three-year-old and now four-year-old kinder with a pre-prep year is a game changer that will stand these small Victorians – our littlest Victorians – in the best stead possible, not only to adjust more readily to the primary and secondary school environments, not only because of co-located kinders at new schools, from here, not only because of the opportunities to access world-class play-based education but also in the way in which that alleviates the cost of living for families where, because of the cost of day care and child care, two-income households have not been possible.

When we think about the fact that three-year-old kinder will save families up to \$2500 per child, per year, this is a significant inroad into the cost of living for families who are facing increased cost pressures. We also know that this cost is one of the key barriers to female participation in the paid workforce. And I do underscore 'paid', because nothing says work quite like raising a child and preparing it for the world ahead, and returning to the paid workforce is an opportunity that so many women have not been able to take up because of either a lack of services or capacity or indeed the costs associated with meeting child care and long day care or day care expenses. So in combination

the saving of up to \$2500 a year and an opportunity to move from either one to two incomes in a household or indeed perhaps to one income – overwhelmingly in this case mums – where a mum can return to paid work makes a world of difference. It also helps with addressing our workforce shortages. It means, for example, that women can enter the paid workforce in a variety of sectors and jobs and industries in growth sectors because of initiatives such as free TAFE.

I note that Minister for Training and Skills, Minister Tierney, is here in the chamber today, and again I place on record the very deep and profound respect that the community of Eastern Victoria Region has for the opportunities provided not just through free TAFE, not just through the skills, training and vocational packages that have been afforded through free TAFE, but also through the record investment in campuses and in programs, services and educators. These are the jobs that will create economic certainty. These are the jobs that will stand us in good stead for prosperity now and into the long term. These are the jobs through TAFE and training opportunities that mean that people can live and learn closer to where they study and that they will not need to head further afield in order to earn once they have received their qualification.

The Governor's address also refers to bringing back the SEC. This again is a game changer. Not only does it enable us to continue to tackle our ambitious nation-leading targets as far as emissions are concerned and the uptake of renewable energy, it is also about creating jobs. It is about making sure that the crest of global interest in renewable energy does not pass us by. It means that we can lean into difficult conversations about transition and economic development and growth, including for the Latrobe Valley, including for areas that have been traditionally and intergenerationally dependent upon coal-fired power, to talk about battery storage, to talk about offshore wind, to talk about solar and hydro, to talk about the skills and training pathways that will lead to secure, long-term and well-paid employment.

When we think about the SEC and the return of the SEC, this is a policy which had a profound impact in the Latrobe Valley. No-one in the valley can forget the devastation caused when privatisation took effect. There were broadly three categories of people as a consequence of privatisation and what occurred in the immediate aftermath. One group of people left; they took redundancy payments and departed from the valley. Another set up small businesses, a number of which did not succeed. Others paid off their mortgages, met their outstanding debts and were then faced with the challenges of not being able to secure additional work.

Transition is hard. We know this because we have experienced it so many times, and we have leaned into solutions or proposals for it with varying degrees of success over many years. Transition work continues with the SEC. This is about having a centre in Morwell – the office set up to facilitate the way in which the rest of the SEC evolves, the way in which we continue to drive toward our emissions targets of 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and net zero by 2045.

To that end I want to congratulate the water sector, a sector which is leading the way in a transition to renewables. In some instances, and I am thinking of Wannon Water in particular, getting to zero emissions by 2030 is an ambitious but achievable goal. I note my colleague here Ms Ermacora has been a key driver of work into renewables across the water sector, and it is wonderful to see that that work continues as we match that with our renewable energy aspirations.

We also need to make sure that we are taking account of a growing population. This is where, when we think about a population projected to grow to 8.454 million by 2041 in Victoria, we have got some significant challenges in the way in which we meet the scale of commitments that deliver livability, improved opportunity, equity and future pathways for all Victorians.

This is about health and hospital care. It is about access to specialised care and treatment, in particular for women. Again, knowing that mobile clinics and women's specialist healthcare hubs will be set up around the state is a big part of making sure that every part of our population is taken care of, including where distance may remain a bar to getting and receiving treatment. We also know that investing in

our health and hospital care system is about taking care of pathways and training for health and hospital workers. It is about acknowledging the very, very significant toll taken upon our extraordinary health and hospital care workers in the course of the pandemic. It is about following through not only on the incentive payments which were made, not only on the scholarships and professional development payments and incentives that have been made but also providing for professional development pathways for this important cohort.

I also want to acknowledge the tireless efforts that have gone into the health and hospital system from people working in non-clinical settings. To the cleaners, the porters, the orderlies, the cooks, the administrative staff and the list goes on: without you, our health and hospital system cannot function. This is why, again, recognition of the valuable work that you provide is also at the heart of our work to invest in people now and into the future.

We want to make sure that we also continue to develop and to deliver our record funding into infrastructure as it relates to schools. When I think about the work that has occurred in particular across the Latrobe Valley over the last eight years, when I think about early childhood, primary, secondary and technical and further education infrastructure that has been improved and when I think about partnerships with the Latrobe Regional Hospital and that \$217 million fund that is improving that hospital itself, the partnerships with Federation University and the partnerships with TAFE Gippsland and the brand new \$35 million campus, these are the sorts of things that spring to mind when we talk about opportunity.

When I think about the Big Housing Build – \$5.3 billion – and the \$1.25 billion of which will be invested in regional Victoria and the \$50 million of that money that will go into youth housing and homelessness initiatives, including in regional and rural Victoria, these are the great equalisers in the opportunities that every Victorian deserves.

Deputy President, I seek your indulgence and, by leave, some further time to continue my contribution for 5 minutes or so.

Leave granted.

Harriet SHING: Thank you for that, Deputy President, and for your indulgence. I would also like to note the work that we are doing to develop our paramedic workforce and to assist our teachers and early childhood educators to continue their valuable contributions. Making sure that we can transition, for example, to paramedic practitioners to make sure that we have an agreed model of care to strengthen our ambulance service while reducing pressure on the hospital system is a vital part of interoperability and of meeting future population challenges.

We also know that making sure we can upgrade local schools and specialist schools will in fact enable facilities to be delivered that match the efforts, the hard work, the talent, the passion and the dedication of staff and teachers and school communities everywhere. It was a profound honour to hear the Premier talk about specialist education and the way in which that will deliver exceptional benefits to people who for so long have had to fight every single step of the way for a voice, for a seat at the table and to be heard on the way in which specialist needs in education can be met. Making sure that there are additional extracurricular activities within the specialist school setting is vital, as are scholarships to attract more speech pathologists and occupational therapists to regional areas – again, regional areas, where specialist schools make a world of difference, particularly for families who live often considerable distances away from any other major centre where their child might receive appropriate care and opportunities in a learning environment.

The need for professional development for healthcare workers, including how to communicate with autistic folk – again, the idea of neurodivergence, neurodiversity, forming part of the allocation of election commitments – is profound. What it says is that difference is to be recognised and wherever possible celebrated, and a facilitated approach to improving opportunities not only demonstrates a responsible set of decisions by government and a dignified set of opportunities for people in our

community but also serves to break down stigma and discrimination and the sense of difference that so many people living with disability experience every day of their lives. Making sure that we also support students with a disability through TAFE transition officers, aqua therapy pools at specialist schools and a Premier's advisory committee means that we can continue this good work – continue it in a considered, a focused and an outcomes-based way – as well as make sure that we continue to apply access to specific programs for those who are non-verbal and, in a cause very, very dear to my own heart, train more therapy animals.

It is initiatives like these which go alongside record investment – investment such as new hospital for West Gippsland, \$610 million to \$675 million to deliver 233 new beds, plus a new public aged care facility. These are record investments. They are investments which our communities deserve, and they are investments which will enable our communities to continue to grow and to grow well and healthily into the future. As we move to continue with the Suburban Rail Loop and the Metro rail tunnel, we will also go on with the work of removing level crossings. This is work which has received enormous acclaim across the state for improving accessibility, improving amenity and indeed providing opportunities for communities to come together without large unsafe roads between them.

I am going to finish very shortly, but I do just want to touch on the jobs and the opportunities that we are committed to continuing to deliver. We know that we have workforce shortages, but we also know that we have record low unemployment rates. We know that the profile and the demographic of the Victorian economy is such that meeting service demand immediately after the upswing following this pandemic creates a number of challenges that businesses and communities are experiencing all over the state. But we also know we are in a position to create pathways that deliver certainty for workforce and community participation into the future. When these pieces come together, as they do and as they must, in a framework which is guided toward whole-of-life improvement from the very early days of early childhood learning through to primary school and access to better facilities, through secondary school and pathways to TAFE and training, education and further placement, we can see that then we have in place a set of circumstances which, coupled with infrastructure, will enable more Victorians to reach their full potential over the whole of their lifetimes. These are not easy investments, but they are always worthwhile. They are investments which need and deserve to cover every part of the state in the ways which matter most.

As we begin this work in earnest as this parliamentary year gets underway I want to acknowledge so many people across communities who put so much hard work into guiding this policy framework. It is a privilege and indeed an honour to be part of this Parliament and to continue the work that has begun and indeed proceeded over the last eight years. There is so much to get on with. I am delighted that we have new colleagues joining us. I am delighted that we have a Parliament more diverse than ever before, and I am looking forward to seeing us continue to gather momentum as our ambitious yet achievable promises and opportunities are realised. On that basis I thank you, Deputy President, and I thank the house for the indulgence of the additional time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:42): I am pleased, Deputy President, to rise and speak to the Governor's speech, congratulating you on your re-election as Deputy President but also noting the service that the Governor has given to the people of Victoria, and I want to place on record my respect for and appreciation of her and Tony and the great work they have done over their period in Government House. I was impressed that they were the first of the Commonwealth jurisdictions to meet the new King. I welcome the award that has been given by the new King for service to Linda Dessau, our Governor in Victoria. I think that that is a marker of the service that she has given not just to King Charles III but to the people of Victoria.

But noting that the Governor's speech is a speech written for her by the government of the day, there are significant deficiencies in the Governor's speech. When one looks quickly at the Governor's speech one becomes alarmed that many of the key issues have not been confronted. If you look at health – and my eyes immediately went to health, and I listened carefully as she spoke – there was nothing in the health discussion that would deal with the massive growth in the waiting lists under this

government. As health minister when I left – and 30 June 2014 was the last full year's figures – just over 38,000 Victorians were on the official waiting lists. It is now in the mid-80,000s on the waiting lists – a huge increase, and an increase that had well and truly started before COVID. That increase was obviously impacted by COVID, but we have the longest waiting list I think in the state's history and huge lists in key locations. In my electorate Monash Health, Eastern Health and Alfred Health in particular, and all of those health services, have got massive waiting lists. This has a direct and terrible, frightening impact on so many Victorians, particularly older Victorians and particularly vulnerable Victorians. It appears the government is heartlessly uninterested in dealing with this. It seems incompetent and unable to deal with these problems.

I see the announcement of the heart hospital opening. Now, my information is that it is not actually fully functional as yet, and that comes from nursing staff within the hospital, who indicate that it is on a sort of skeleton staff and they are trying to piece together enough people to run it. But the truth is that we announced that hospital in 2014. It was the Liberals who announced it first – \$130 million for a hospital to be built on the Monash Medical Centre site – and the Labor Party sought to match that policy. What they did not tell people is that they did not intend to build a remotely similar hospital but to build a distant hospital on the Monash University education campus, not near the hospital, which has involved thereby the massive duplication of facilities – the massive duplication of ICU and other facilities, including the sterilising and kitchen facilities, a massive increase. We will wait and see what the final cost is, but all the information I have is that it is north of \$550 million. How on earth you start off with a hospital somewhere between \$100 million and \$200 million and end up with something north of \$500 million is quite extraordinary.

And they have been so slow to build it. That hospital, if we had been in government, would have been built by the election in 2018, and that was Labor's commitment too. It is extraordinary to go back and look at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings through that period between 2014 and 2018. Jill Hennessy was valiantly trying to explain when it would be finished and what the cost would be, and every time the questions were asked the cost was going up and up and up. My information is that the cost will be significantly north of \$550 million, and 2023 – I will let the people do the arithmetic from 2014. That is nine years not four years. It is five years late and more than three times the original budget. How on earth could they be so incompetent – just blindingly incompetent – that they could fail to manage that project properly from the start. It is a needed project, a project announced in government by the coalition, but a project delivered nine years after – five years late – and at more than three times the original cost estimates that Labor themselves had put on it.

These health issues are very significant, and I notice the inadequate funding for many of the health projects that are listed by the government in the Governor's speech. The new Royal Melbourne and the new Royal Women's are not fully funded. There is a bit over \$2 billion there; they are going to need north of six-and-a-bit billion dollars, and there even seems to be some doubt about that figure – whether it is larger. The campus is being split. This is, I think, a suboptimal outcome in many regards, splitting the campus. They say they want to put the outpatients and other facilities down in the new Arden corner.

All of this is designed to prop up the Metro Tunnel, and the Metro itself is a case study in how not to conduct a project. If you look at the work on the Metro, it is at least \$3 billion over budget. There are still many significant problems with the Metro that I am aware of and that many people are well aware of, and they will come to fruition or to public notice in the next period. But \$3 billion – how do you get these projects so wrong? How do you get them so incompetently focused? It is just bizarre. We have seen today Corey Hannett resign. I think that that is quite extraordinary, and we need proper explanations about our controller general. He had a funny title, and I sort of thought it was a little bit Gilbert and Sullivan-like really, calling him the controller general – the head honcho, the director of traffic. He has gone, but let us face it, the choices to replace him are not great either.

I understand Kevin Devlin is going in there, and he comes from a disgraceful background in the performance of the level crossing removal authority rolling over local communities. We have heard

in the last few days of the behaviour of the level crossing removal authority in Surrey Hills and Mont Albert – disgraceful behaviour – and even last night on the news of its disgraceful activities in terms of its untruthful communications with local residents. We saw last night a local resident who had been told they would be able to access their home, but they cannot get in there for many months to come. But the big whopper that was told there – the big lie told by the government and the local member ahead of the 2018 election – is that with the two level crossing removals at Mont Albert and at Surrey Hills you would get two new stations built. They have culled that, and they are actually only building one new station – again, shamefully misleading the community.

The truth on level crossings of course is that they have never once released the final costings of any single level crossing that has been built under this government. There is no reason why level crossing costs, after the completion of the project, could not be released, and indeed in my view they should be released. It is very clear that the huge cost blowouts in level crossing costs, particularly for each and almost every level crossing, are a big part of the government's reluctance to release this information. They do not want to release this information because it is embarrassing; it is deeply embarrassing. The truth is that the first tranche of level crossings was one cost, the next tranche – half the number – was about the same cost. The truth of the matter is that money has been moved from the second program into the first to prop up the underestimates in the first.

We certainly support level crossings. We did a number of them in government, Springvale being one of the main ones, but we also commenced crossings like the one at Burke Road. These are important steps, but they have got to be completed still on time and on budget. Projects that are likely twice the budget of the original cost estimates are much less value for public money, noting the government commenced the level crossing removals before doing a business case and then they did a business case. But how do the business cases look later when the costs are at least double in many cases? How do the business cases look in a 'does it stack up' sense? Is this the right spending in the right place in the right way? These are legitimate questions that people can ask, but of course the details of the costs, the details of the outcomes for each and every level crossing have never, ever been released. We have asked for them in this chamber, we have asked for them at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. They have been asked for at FOI, and the government has fought and fought and fought on every occasion not to release that basic information.

But this is a government, too, where these projects, wherever you look, are out of control, even very good recently opened projects like the Mordialloc bypass, which is 40 per cent over budget and years late – huge failings in these projects to deliver on time and on budget.

There is a real issue in fact with the performance of the government in terms of its ability to deliver on key services, whether it is health – emergency services are in crisis. We have heard again and again about the failure of the 000 service and the failure of the ambulance service. We have heard again and again about the failure of the government to meet its elective surgery targets and the failure to actually get people in for surgery and get them out in a reasonable time according to the rules, and the waiting list has blown out. We had a question in the chamber today that touched on the homelessness issue. When it comes to basic services, this government cannot deliver. They cannot seem to deliver properly. In education we have seen a fall in performance in a number of key areas of literacy and numeracy, and they are the basic measures. These are really very important measures of actual outcomes for the community – actual results, actual final outcomes for individuals who are affected by government services.

When it comes to trains and trams, the trams are not performing well and the trains have lifted their performance somewhat but are still at only two-thirds of the volume from pre-COVID, from 2019. They are now meeting their targets, but they have only got two-thirds of the passengers. It is a little bit like that famous *Yes Minister* hospital in the Midlands that seemed to work very well when it did not have the people going through it. This is where we are when it comes to public transport. V/Line has been a basket case and remains a basket case in terms of performance and those performance metrics that the people expect to see, like reliability. If you look at the Albury-Wodonga line – Ms Lovell

understands the non-performance of that line, and I just pick that as an example of a country service where the performance has not been up to scratch for the whole period of this government – it has declined from where it was in 2014. It has never reached the performance level that the previous government achieved.

That is true also in the Metro system, where by 2019 the performance had declined so dramatically, with not only the issues of reliability but the issues of punctuality as well. The government's solution to the punctuality issue of course is to do something like put a new timetable in that is a slower timetable. A slower timetable is an outcome that the people did not want; they wanted a faster timetable. If it takes you an extra 4 minutes to get from Melbourne to Cranbourne or from Melbourne to Caulfield, that is a poor outcome. Even though the government starts meeting its metrics now, it is meeting its weakened recordings of metrics and meeting them in the circumstance where it is only carrying two-thirds of the passengers.

When I looked at the Governor's speech – and as I have said, I have a high level of respect for Linda Dessau, our Governor, and the work that she has done, and I wish her well after she retires in June – what I found glaringly absent was a focus on actual performance and outcomes for the community, actual results, whether it be in health, whether it be in education, whether it be in matters of homelessness, whether it be in transport or whether it be in housing; all of these. Ms Lovell will point out very closely that the housing failure under this government is just extraordinary. The waiting list has grown massively since she was minister, and the waiting list is a shocking outcome in the sense that people are now waiting routinely many, many years to get into public housing.

Wendy Lovell: A 60 per cent increase.

David DAVIS: A 60 per cent increase in the period since 2014. That is again a performance measure that directly impacts on community and on people. Families that cannot get into public housing have every right to be angry, have every right to be furious, with this government that has presided over that failure in performance. Whether it is housing, whether it is transport, whether it is in education, whether it is in health, that performance has slipped and slipped badly under this government, and I think the community should be unhappy about that.

All of this has happened while the government has been ratcheting up debt. Before the 2018 election we saw the then Treasurer walk out and say, 'No, we're going to lift debt to GSP', gross state product, 'from 6 per cent to 12 per cent'. Well, now it is up near 20 per cent, and it is heading to somewhere north of 25, 26, 27 per cent on the projections going forward. As interest rates climb it is going to put further and further pressure on that borrowing. People will remember that now Victoria's debt is scheduled to be bigger than that of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. That is a very significant failure of performance of this government. Much of that has gone into project overruns and cost overruns on major projects where the government has not controlled the cost.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:02): Thank you, President, and congratulations to you on your election.

Let me first take a moment to acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on, and pay my respects to their elders past and present and emerging. I would also like to pay my respects to all First Peoples, but I want to single out the Bunurong Boon Wurrung in particular. My electoral region of Southern Metropolitan lies within their traditional country, and I want to say thank you for their long custodianship of the land: thank you for caring for the waterways, the beaches and the native flora and fauna of this stunning part of what we call Narm, or Melbourne.

I want to thank and pay tribute to my campaign manager Joshua Bruni and the countless campaign volunteers, including my electoral staff of Jesse Gardner Russell, Molly Britt and Zachary Kaplan. I would also like to pay tribute to Richard Marles, Sam Rae, Glenn Sterle, Tony Sheldon, the late Alex Gallacher, Matt Burnell, Jana Stewart and Chris Ford for all of their support.

Thank you also to my family. Some of them are here today. My wife Vanessa – my best friend, my sounding board – has been a tremendous support to me over the journey. Nessie has one of the toughest jobs imaginable, caring for people with cancer at all stages. Her compassion, empathy and caring nature for the unwell people is what defines her. If I contribute to this place in even a fraction of the way that Nessie contributes to the life of her patients, then I will be truly grateful. I know the years of serving the union movement have been very long. They kept me from home, and my new job in Parliament will do the same. But your commitment to me, to us, is the rock I build my life on, and I will love you and admire you always.

I would also like to acknowledge my father-in-law Gary, who proudly served in the air force, mothers-in-law Helen and Jill and my sister-in-law Natalie and her husband Rob and thank them for embracing me into their family. Special thanks to my niece and goddaughter Emily and her husband Mark for all of their support.

My late parents John and Mary would have loved this day. My mum was a nurse and a midwife and a very talented musician. There were three big things in her life: her family, the Catholic Church and making sure all the kids in the Broadmeadows area of Melbourne were vaccinated against polio, TB and diphtheria. My dad had a very varied and interesting life. At one stage he worked at the local flour mill in Glenroy in the accounts department. It was there he discovered he had an aptitude for working with figures, an aptitude he used to eventually become a successful businessman.

Dad was what people at the time called a self-made man. He had a strong work ethic and a deep commitment to his family and to his faith. He battled poor health but still managed to run a small business, developed land on Melbourne's outskirts and for a while even got into cattle breeding. So how did the son of what these days we would call an entrepreneur end up as a union official and now a Labor member of Parliament? Dad had great eyes for a business opportunity, but he also had an enduring sense of fairness, that everyone deserved a fair go and that it was his job to work hard and to make the pie a little bigger so that there was more to go around for everyone. So that is where my sense of justice, my sense of fairness, comes from.

As for dedicating my life to representing working people, that came early. I was a teenager when I started working as a jackaroo on a property in the Riverina. It was tough work, but I loved it. It also turned out to be the place where I saw how unfair life could be for working people who were in no real position to bargain with their employer. After crunching my knee on the weekend playing football, the boss offered me two choices: leave the property or be sacked. On the other hand, it was also near the Riverina that I saw the power working people could exercise through unions when they grouped together. I witnessed the wide comb dispute unfold. That culminated in a 10-week shearers strike coordinated by the union movement. The funny thing is a lot of those shearers would have voted for the conservative side of politics, but they were diehard unionists. Why? Because they could see firsthand the power they could exercise to get better pay and conditions for hard and often dangerous work by coming together. I could see perhaps what they could not – that Labor, the party founded during the previous Shearers' Strike way back in the 1890s, was the only political movement that was really ever going to have their backs. I would see this time and time again in all the jobs I held.

When I worked at Ansett I saw the real outcomes that the Transport Workers Union delivered for working people doing hard, strenuous, often dangerous work. Inspired by this, in 1993 I stepped up and became a delegate. I wanted to be a voice at the table, sharing the stories and concerns of my airline industry friends and colleagues. The then legendary Bill Noonan, my mentor, brought me aboard full time with the TWU as a union organiser. I eventually became the branch secretary in 2016.

I want to pay tribute to those who worked with me to get those great outcomes: people like Chris Fennell, John Rowe, the late David White, James Hughes, Allan 'Shorty' Taylor, Mike McNess, Mem Suleyman, Dissio Markos, Bill Baarini, John Parker and the branch committee of management, and Frank, Sandy, Matt Rocks and the directors of TWUSuper. I am lucky. I have been paid to sit at the big tables with the CEOs, bosses and superannuation trustees and talk about what really drives me: the

core Labor values of fairness and improving the lives, employment conditions and retirements of working people so they can retire with dignity. But I also got time to chat to truckies, airline ramp workers and catering staff. In short, I get it, and now I get to be part of a government that gets it, delivering for working people. What really matters to working people is fairness, and that means making a case for fair and decent wages.

Did I mention I am a stickler for fairness? I want to tell you why the fight for fairness is in my bones. We know all too well that certain employers will take advantage of their employees. Given the current cost-of-living constraints these days, every cent counts. Regardless of the economic climate, the underpayment of wages and non-payment of superannuation is never acceptable. You see, I understand the sinister consequences of wage theft, especially in the transport sector. It creates financial pressure on truck drivers, which forces them to speed, drive excessive hours, skip rest breaks and take other risks just to put food on the table. In short, it is dangerous, and the result can be catastrophic for drivers, their families and the community. I proposed a motion at the 2017 ALP conference, calling for wage theft to be criminalised. The resolution was adopted. It took some time to come to fruition, but it was momentous that on 1 July 2021 it became a crime for an employer in Victoria to deliberately and dishonestly underpay employees.

It also became a crime to withhold wages, superannuation and other employee entitlements deliberately and dishonestly or to falsify them. Only a Labor government would make this law, Labor values being not racing to the bottom by short-changing workers decent wages and superannuation, robbing them of a decent retirement. I am proud of the progress the labour movement has made in delivering these wages reforms and ensuring there is adequate deterrence against unscrupulous employers. But this work is never done, and in my new role I am not going to throw in the towel of fighting for fairness.

While I am now here in Spring Street, my good friends in the trade union movement such as Michael Kaine, Nick McIntosh, Richard Olsen, Ian ‘Smithy’ Smith and Tim Dawson will keep flying the flag and fighting the good fight on behalf of the mighty rank-and-file members and fearless delegates and health and safety reps of the TWU. Who could forget my friends at the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, particularly long-serving state secretary Michael Donovan; the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union and their strong state secretary John Setka; and the Rail, Tram and Bus Union and their newly elected state secretary Vik Sharma – I congratulate you. I would also like to acknowledge the union movement as a whole: the ACTU, Victorian Trades Hall and the regional trades halls, the many friends from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the TWU of America. I also acknowledge my many friends in this place and the other place who I am proud to serve with: Minister Natalie Suleyman, Minister Anthony Carabines, Matt Fregon, Sarah Connolly, Anthony Cianflone and the newly elected member for Koroit and my good friend Luba Grigorovitch. I was in the chamber during her inaugural speech two weeks ago, and I am excited to keep up the fight with her.

We know public infrastructure is disproportionately relied upon by working people, not the rich, so how inspiring is it that the Andrews Labor government is delivering the largest infrastructure program ever conceived in this state’s history. Every day I drive past the Big Build projects, and I can see what an astounding transformational impact they are having on our state now and the long tail of productivity that is to come. These are not just roads, tunnels and bridges, they are pathways to creating thousands and thousands of jobs, boosting skills, careers, opportunities and choices, while enabling people to get to work, to school and back home to their families faster and helping bring people and communities together. My dad would have loved this – a government investing to create opportunities for all, lifting everyone up.

I mentioned my mum was passionate about health and health care. In fact such was her conviction and sense of duty she kept up her nursing registration until she was almost 80, just in case she was ever needed in the field. Care and compassion are a big deal with my family. As I mentioned before, my wife Vanessa is an oncology nurse. One of my sisters is a midwife, another works in patient transport

and a third works in the allied health field. My eldest daughter Kate is a nurse at the Mulgrave Private Hospital. My middle daughter Megan has a double degree in social science and services and works with vulnerable Victorians. So it is important to me that the Labor Andrews government is putting health front and centre, with bold plans for the system and the people on the front line to ensure the best care through a multibillion-dollar program for new public hospitals and emergency care, community health services, ambulance branches, residential aged care and mental health facilities.

This government will deliver on the biggest hospital projects in Australia's history, with massive upgrades to the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital and the construction of the new Arden medical precinct, giving patients right across Victoria the very best of care, connected by a brand new train line. This is game-changing stuff. But do you know what really excites me? The fact that the Andrews Labor government is providing free degrees and training and upskilling the next generation of healthcare workers. This \$270 million healthcare workforce package is designed to support the recruitment and training of 17,000 nurses and midwives. That is 17,000 more health workers making a real difference to the lives of Victorians. That is the work of a government that gets it.

The region I represent is home to Monash University, which counts among its thousands of students my youngest daughter Rachel, who is currently studying music and science. I have three adult stepchildren. Elise has a degree in human resources, Megan is commencing her university studies in social work, and Lucas has begun a career of service with the Australian Defence Force and will march out this Friday at Kapooka.

As a parent and step-parent of six kids all up, I have plenty of firsthand experience of the primary, secondary and tertiary education systems. Both my parents were lifelong learners before the term was even coined, and my eldest sister is a teacher. So you do not have to tell me about the importance of education and how vital their jobs are in shaping the future of our children. We need to do much more to ensure that we have qualified, well-rounded teachers to address the shortages across the system, from kindergarten to VCE. That is why I am incredibly excited about the Andrews government's free TAFE program. Again, this will be a game changer for our state. This government was elected on a platform of doing the stuff that matters. I could not be prouder to be part of this Labor team, with its extraordinary mandate to deliver on a progressive agenda and to find innovative and lasting solutions that will make our state better and a fairer place. There is plenty of vision and courage, but there is much work to be done, and it will be done. I look forward to making a solid start alongside so many fresh faces in this house and contributing to Labor's third term, led by Premier Dan Andrews.

I am honoured and humbled to be here. This is a place of robust debate, and I look forward to the brave conversations, ideas and arguments and to listening, representing and advocating respectfully – always. But I always look forward to getting stuff done, the stuff that matters to me and you.

Members applauded.

Sitting suspended 3:19 pm until 3:32 pm.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (15:32): President, parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour and a humbling experience to be standing here in this grand Parliament House.

First, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that we govern and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Today I ask you to share with me a very special experience, an achievement that I would not have dreamed of or imagined, because standing before you is a person not born in this country. English is not my first language, and like many other Australians whose families come from distant lands, my family was among the thousands of boat refugees that arrived and settled in Australia with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Fast forward 44 years, and here I am, standing in the highest office in this

state as the first Australian Vietnamese Liberal member of the Victorian Parliament. It is a very proud moment for my family and a remarkable achievement for a little boy who arrived in this country with his family in search of freedom and with aspirations for a brighter future. It demonstrates to the hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants who come to this country in search of a better life that with hard work and determination anything is possible in a free and democratic society.

It also validates the men and women who legislated the welcoming of refugees from Indochina, fleeing from a communist dictatorship, over 45 years ago – an immigration policy formed on compassionate principles, while maintaining our national sovereignty. Whatever the economic investment outlay the government of the day was willing to burden the nation with, our country has benefited tenfold, as those newcomers settled, integrated into our society and now call Australia home. I am honoured to say it was a Liberal government led by our 22nd Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser who implemented these policies.

This is my story. My journey began on 30 March 1979 when I was hustled in the middle of the night by my parents onto a boat in the harbour of Cà Mau on the southern coast of Vietnam. Overcrowded and packed like sardines, the boat made its way out to sea. After a few days into our journey, we came across something that no-one had anticipated – an encounter with sea pirates. They robbed and towed our boats until they were satisfied there was nothing left. As soon as the boat was cut loose, we were intercepted and boarded again by another two vessels. This went on for seven days and nights, and the shortage of fresh water was becoming a greater threat as so many people were on board.

Finally, on reaching the coast of Malaysia the mixture of joy, relief and excitement was overwhelming as people caught sight of land in the distance. But as the boat got closer to shore we were faced with another obstacle. The Malaysian coastguard denied us entry and towed our boat back out to sea. After several attempts at landing, people feared we were going to be forced back out to the open sea. The human instinct of survival kicked in as individuals took matters into their own hands as a result of the boat taking water. The next thing I knew I was clinging onto my dad as he made his way to shore. So as you can see the concept of turning back the boats is nothing new. Whether these actions are right or wrong, those in positions of power must understand that for every course of action there are consequences that follow. So having survived a lonely sea journey, life then shows you another meaning of hardship and uncertainty as time stood still for those remaining in refugee camps. Just picture barbed wire fences, makeshift shelter, your daily food rationed, no TV, no air conditioning and definitely no couches. You are lucky to have some chairs. There are communal showers and open pit latrines. These were the conditions that people had to endure for years as they waited for their refugee application to be accepted – experiences and images that are forever embedded in my childhood memories.

Some say it is the challenges in your life that shape who you are. I believe it is the love of family and those around you, because I am blessed with two loving parents who sacrificed their lives so I could have a brighter future. They gave up all the pleasures in life and educational opportunities in a new country in pursuit of work and to provide for their family and to rebuild a new life. In doing so, I watched my parents tolerate social and racial discrimination with the little language they had, feeling helpless, unable to do anything at the time. This is something I am determined to correct. I believe strong family values and access to good education are essential for every Australian, as they provide opportunities and choices later in life, as I have discovered.

Having completed my HSC at Blackburn High and continuing on to study civil engineering at RMIT, it was during these years when I realised my true calling, which is to help others. Much to the shock and surprise of my parents, I joined the Victoria Police. Throughout my policing career I served with distinction and integrity, including the recognition of and assisting in bridging the gap between Victoria Police and the Vietnamese community. But in recent times, for a person whose entire life has been championing freedom and equality and the right to expression and free speech, I am deeply concerned about how a narrative can turn the course of history, where one group can have so much influence on authority and media that they are free to demonstrate their democratic right to march,

speak and protest en masse, and yet in similar circumstances another group is quickly shut down, labelled and judged without due process, experiencing the full force of the law. I hope my time in this chamber is long enough to see some variation in this imbalance of fairness and equality.

Serving the community is my drive, but a desire to serve one's nation was a void I needed to fill. Juggling my family commitment and career, I enlisted in the Australian Army reserve. There were many highlights through my 19 years of service, but the most significant achievement was when I led a section of military police through the alpine region in the north-west of Victoria during the 2019–20 bushfire state of emergency, supporting local fireys in evacuating residents from the fire front. As I was helping those evacuees from their homes and displaced families at evacuation centres, seeing the facial expressions of despair, loss, hopelessness and gratitude on these families who had lost everything brought back some memories, as images of my past flooded back. I came to realise that the wheel had turned full circle – once a refugee and stateless, now in a position to help displaced citizens of a country that took me in.

So as I am standing here capitalising on this moment, I am grateful for the opportunity that Australia has given my family: the freedom and security to live and enjoy life without fear of persecution. I am grateful to the Fraser government for its immigration policy and the role it played in resettling hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers, including my family. This is something the Vietnamese community in Australia will never forget. I am sure those in the gallery today of Vietnamese heritage will agree with me.

I am grateful to the 11 lower house candidates and all the volunteers for their hard work and dedication and to the people of the Western Metropolitan Region for entrusting me with the honour of representing them in the 60th Parliament. It is a privilege I will not take lightly or neglect. I will work extremely hard to uphold their expectations. The Western Metropolitan Region, with its 11 districts, covers from Footscray to outer west Werribee and reaches as far north as Sunbury, with its southern coastline expanding to Point Cook, the birthplace of the Royal Australian Air Force. The region has a rapidly growing population of over half a million people, with culture and heritage extending from all over the world. The community also have their own family stories of survival, personal sacrifices and hardship in their journey of settlement in Australia.

Before today I had the honour of representing the west as a local councillor at Brimbank City Council, one of the six councils in the region. Like all neighbouring councils, Western Metropolitan lacks the connectivity and major infrastructure to keep up with the growing population. Its roads and major carriageways are in desperate need of upgrading, and in places throughout the region the absence of different modes of public transport is a common theme. This is compounded by growth areas being dependent on an out-of-date bus service system. Through private enterprise, housing and new developments are emerging to meet the demand. The government is happy to collect the taxes and levies, but their failure to invest and implement critical civic infrastructure and sustainable urban planning has left the west decades behind the rest of the world and the rest of the state.

The people of the Western Metropolitan Region sent us a message in the last state election: the west no longer accepts second-best and bandaid solutions; the west will no longer be landfill or a dumping ground for the state. Their message is clear. I hear them, and I will be their voice. I will advocate for those minority groups and be the voice of those multicultural communities. I also want to strengthen pride in our Australian flag and appreciation of our veterans to ensure future generations recognise the contributions these service men and women made to our country, acknowledge their service and honour those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice defending democracy under our flag so that we can have freedom and liberty, which are so often taken for granted. Let us not forget that it is not only white Australians who have served and fallen. There were Asian Australians and thousands of Indigenous Australians who volunteered. They also fought in these conflicts for our democracy. This is the freedom that hundreds of thousands of people around the world at this very moment are seeking and risking their lives for.

The pursuit of freedom and equality is in my upbringing. I believe true democracy can deliver equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, colour, religion or where you live. For inspiration, I refer to Dr Martin Luther King, a renowned civil rights movement leader:

I have a dream that my four ... children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

I too share that dream, with my five children who are with us today – Kimberley, Josephine, Stephanie, Genevieve and Michael – that they should live in a free society, fulfil their dreams, contribute to the country and not be judged by their gender, their faith, their race or their postcode but rather on their character and abilities. This is why I am standing in this grand house. This is why I returned my badge and stepped aside from a distinguished police career of 28 years. I want to break down that unconscious bias and stereotype. I want to lay a foundation to foster cultural diversity leadership and help take down the bamboo ceiling.

The Australian Human Rights Commission's race discrimination commissioner Chin Tan tabled the *Leading for Change* report. It indicates 95 per cent of senior leaders in Australia are of Anglo-Celtic or European heritage, with only 5 per cent of non-European or Indigenous backgrounds in leadership roles although these groups make up 24 per cent, or almost a quarter, of Australia's population. The chancellor of the Australian National University, Professor Gareth Evans, proclaimed in a speech:

Asian-Australians have been under-appreciated and under-utilised in our listed companies and public institutions for far too long.

Whether you agree with these academic assessments or not, you must look around this room and in the Assembly chamber next door and understand: if Australia is truly a land of the fair go, we as a nation have got to do better. I am not suggesting any type of quota but rather equal opportunity and a genuine reward for effort, because taking the easy option is not always the best solution.

I intend to unshackle the chains of stereotyping and unconscious bias in all key institutions. Australia has a pool of diverse leadership styles from all over the globe, and yet we are ignoring our homegrown talents because of unconscious bias and the stereotyping of diverse communities. What I say to these key stakeholders, leaders, senior executives and CEOs of institutions in private and public sectors is: do not mistake the quiet reserve, humility and respect for seniority as a trait of weakness. I am voicing this to ensure that our country, states and all leaders start recognising and utilising the resource and talents our homegrown communities have to offer. Many examples of young talents from multicultural communities have come to light in recent times.

In my journey I have thanked the former leader Matthew Guy and our current leader John Pesutto. Because of their family background and upbringing, they recognised my fight and the great potential multicultural communities have to offer. They supported my quest and helped make today's experience an extraordinary one.

I am proud and honoured to be part of this Liberal parliamentary team, because what you have here is a true reflection of our community, a broad, diverse group of people who are not afraid to stand up for their beliefs, a group of people that are willing to call a spade a spade and hold the belief that a contest of ideas is how democratic societies evolve and progress – not cancelling those who have a different point of view to sing the same song, but rather encouraging new ideas and debates.

I would now like to acknowledge and thank a few people that made today possible. Ms Deborah Atkins, Ilias Bougias, thank you very much for your loyal support and for believing in me and being part of my political journey. Mr Ramon Frederico, thank you very much for your continued support of the Vietnamese community over the past 30 years and the strong support of my campaign. To all the Liberal volunteers, especially the 11 lower house candidates, Maria, Golam, Joseph, Angela, Simone, Raja, John, Preet, Emete, Daria and Alan, thank you for your hard work and dedication. As a result we now have two Liberal members in the upper house from the Western Metropolitan Region. To all the loyal Liberal members in the west, thank you very much for staying true blue through all

the hard times. Your efforts and ongoing support throughout the years have made this possible. Thank you to my federal parliamentary colleagues Keith Wolahan, James Paterson and Michael Sukkar for your support, and to my brothers and sisters, uncle and aunty in the Vietnamese community.

To all the members, volunteers and current and past executive committees of the VCA – which is the Vietnamese Community in Australia, Victoria Chapter: thank you very much for your encouragement and support in my campaign, in reaching out to the community and supporting volunteers at the polling booths.

To my mum and dad Thi Ut and Moc Thanh: thank you for your love and sacrifice. The foundations you have laid for me with family values, compassion and love have shaped me into the person I am today, and I am better for it. To my wife Chi: thank you very much for your love and support through the election campaign and for providing us with five beautiful children and the Liberal Party five future members. As I would like to put it, it is the beginning of the Luu dynasty. Without you this would not have been possible. And to my five beautiful children Kimberley Yen, Josephine Tien Nhi, Stephanie Thien Nga, Genevieve Ngoc Bich and Michael Hoang Long Luu: this is for you. I know you will understand when you get a bit older, but today enjoy the moment. And happy birthday, Genevieve.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to leave you with this. If we are seeking true equality, it is equal opportunity for all. No individual and no group or race should have more privilege, resources or rights over another, regardless of their status. Thank you very much for your time and to those who attended today's experience. Thank you very much.

Members applauded.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:00): President, I send my sincerest congratulations to you on a well-deserved reappointment. Today I acknowledge the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as traditional custodians on the land where we gather today and the land which encompasses the south-east. I acknowledge this land was never ceded. I pay my deepest respects to elders past, present and emerging and any First Nations people here today. Reflecting on truth telling and reconciliation, Indigenous Australian voices must be elevated and respected. We all have a responsibility to be open to truth telling to better understand Indigenous histories, initiate discourse and ultimately bring about healing.

I am delighted to be standing here before you today as a newly elected representative for the South Eastern Metropolitan Region. Here we are fortunate to have a kaleidoscope of cultures and languages. It has become an area in which people can live peacefully, learn extensively, find meaningful employment and create memories together. As the most multicultural area of metropolitan Melbourne, it is truly special.

As an independent crossbencher I am free to focus on issues that are important to our community without restriction of party politics. It is a role that I strive to fulfil with dedication and commitment by promoting my constituents' causes to the best of my ability. It is such a privilege to be elected, and I am grateful to all who voted for me and supported cannabis law reform. Thank you.

When I was 17 I discovered Ani DiFranco's music. It certainly lit a fire in my belly politically. Ani is a woman speaking her mind about important issues, like inequality, social justice and women's rights – many of the conversations we still have today. In Ani's words:

My mother was a feminist
She taught me to see
That the road to ruin is paved
With patriarchy
So, let the way of the women
Guide democracy
From plunder and pollution
Let mother earth be free

Feminism ain't about women
No, that's not who it is for
It's about a shifting consciousness
That'll bring an end to war

My path into politics was quite different to most. However, as another member of Parliament to have emerged from the adult industry, I dare say we may see more of us venturing from this path. I will speak more about my career journey in a moment. For now I would like to talk about who I am and what shaped me into the person you see today.

I was born in Newcastle in the summer of 1982, the youngest of five children. My father was a gyprock plasterer, and my mother worked caregiving and administration jobs. My brothers Darren, Christopher and Shaun were all teenagers when I was born. My oldest sister Jennifer had tragically passed away in a car accident at the age of five. I was born to help heal my family. My mum would tell me as a child that I was meant to be here, which always confused me. It was not until I was much older that I realised what she meant by this statement. I later learned that my parents had difficulty conceiving me and explored alternatives, deciding to use a donor. When you are a teenager forming opinions of yourself and developing your identity, finding out news like this can be devastating. Everything I knew about myself I questioned. By the time I was 16 my parents had become foster carers, and the dynamics of our household changed. Home became unstable and unsafe for me, so I decided to stand on my own two feet. Being independent from such a young age instilled in me courage and strength. This was the path that led me here today.

To my mum Julie, I thank you for raising me to be resilient and strong willed, to know my worth and to use my voice.

To my dad Bernie, I thank you for always reminding me that I am your baby girl. You taught me humility, acceptance and to know what I deserve. In my dad's words, 'Everyone's shit stinks, Rachel. They're no better than you.'

I must take a moment to pay tribute to my grandmother Doll, whose legacy will always be cherished. She demonstrated immense strength as the matriarch of our family, even though her married life was one of violence. As my aunt Sally described, 'Doll was a quiet achiever, she was a dressmaker, she was a rock to her girls and she encouraged us to have a work ethic.' Doll's husband, my grandfather, was a police officer, an alcoholic and a brutally violent man. It was not easy for Doll to escape the violence, but she eventually did with the help of her mother's inheritance. Doll was creative in finding ways to be financially independent. She rented out rooms to migrants who were building the railway line. She worked at the local fruit shop, cleaned houses – whatever it took to escape the violence. I relay these stories in this place because I want it to be noted that not all family dynamics are positive or without pain, discomfort and vulnerability. Indeed, many of the dynamics of my family are that of trauma, loss, grief, survival and resilience. This has shaped me into who I am today and is why I stand here today.

As I mentioned earlier, I was drawn to politics from a young age. I have always considered myself someone who attracts opportunities, but opportunities more often than not are something we create for ourselves. My mission is to be in places where decisions are made and to champion voices like mine that deserve to be heard. I am thrilled to stand here today as a member of the 60th Parliament with a 55 per cent majority of women in the chamber. This majority is a first. It is not unusual for me to be surrounded by strong, capable, intelligent and creative women, many of whom are in the chamber today. May we continue to elevate each other. I was the first woman in my family to complete tertiary education, including postgraduate studies. I studied sociology, politics and public policy. Unsurprisingly, it was the women in my family who encouraged me to study.

At the beginning of my career I worked at Centrelink and the Family Court of Australia. I encountered individuals who were going through difficult times. Although it was not easy work by any means, it taught me invaluable lessons that remain with me to this day. I learned not to make assumptions about

people and to always be kind. Working in the courts gave me insight into our family justice system and its imperfections. One of my greatest takeaways from this time was that often when people talk about their rights they neglect to recognise the responsibilities that come along with them.

It was around the same time that I developed a new-found passion for dancing and performance, taking on the persona Freckles Blue. Burlesque has historically been utilised by women as a tool to own their sensuality and power and make political statements through satire. I performed in burlesque clubs across Melbourne, eventually moving to Paris, bumping, grinding and tassel twirling my way across stages in Europe, and I loved it. Fast forward a few years, I had my first experience working in Parliament as an intern with Fiona Patten, the first member of Parliament to emerge from the adult industry. Fiona has paved the way for many women like us to have an influential role in creating meaningful change. I am deeply honoured to call Fiona a friend and a member of my chosen family. Now it is my turn to enter the political scene, and I am thankful for the invaluable mentoring provided by Fiona throughout this process. I would also like to thank Robbie Swan for seeing my potential and providing solid guidance, including regular astrology birth chart readings.

These connections led me to become the general manager of Eros Association, the national peak body that advocates on behalf of the adult industry. This was a unique opportunity, and I pay special thanks to the Eros board for elevating me into leadership. I was involved in many impactful changes, including decriminalisation of sex work, updating discrimination laws and providing small businesses support during the pandemic. I am immensely proud to have advocated for increased recognition for small businesses who are trailblazers operating in a taboo industry. My time at Eros afforded me a unique skill set that will complement working on cannabis law reform. I have worked with many different stakeholders in all jurisdictions. A big part of my job was reviewing and interpreting legislation, as well as pushing for change. I am well versed in working within a sector that is heavily regulated, stigmatised and often discriminated against, much like cannabis.

So why cannabis? Although I may not fit the stereotype, I have used cannabis my whole adult life. It is my chosen medication for anxiety and allows me to relax and calm my mind, and I am not alone in this choice. In fact around 1 million Victorians consume cannabis annually. It is no surprise then that Legalise Cannabis received the fourth highest vote in the election outside of the major parties. This surely screams volumes to the government of what Victorians want.

Calls for law reform in this space are not new. In fact the Australian movement was founded in Nimbin with the establishment of the Hemp Embassy, which is about to celebrate 30 years of activism and education. I pay special thanks to these activists, including Michael Balderstone and Gail Hester, for believing in me and supporting me through this campaign. I would like to take a moment to recognise party secretary Craig Ellis for all of his hard work in getting the party officially registered. His efforts negotiating preferences with like-minded parties delivered an upper house that is undeniably progressive.

I give special mention to my Legalise Cannabis volunteers, especially Jeff, Jenni and Tony. They not only championed the cause but shared their time and personal stories. Jeff found relief using cannabis through his cancer treatment. During the campaign his car, covered in cannabis leaves, could be seen turning heads in Frankston. Jenni is a wheelchair user who campaigned daily at the Berwick early voting centre – rain, hail or shine. Cannabis has vastly improved her quality of life, allowing her to move away from addictive opioid-based pain medications. Jenni has a vehicle that has been converted for her accessibility, but unfortunately she cannot drive due to the current driving laws.

I would also like to thank my friend Tony Verde, who messages me most days with encouragement, telling me I am a rock star. Tony is humble, intelligent and cheeky. I respect that you do not let Parkinson's define you, Tones. I extend my congratulations to David Ettershank, my crossbench colleague. We managed to campaign together, and I am still in disbelief that we are in this chamber today. I would like to express my appreciation for all our candidates who spoke out on behalf of cannabis users and opened up meaningful conversations about its use.

As we enter the 60th Parliament of Victoria, I stand here ready, as one of the first elected representatives of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. I am here to advocate for much-needed reform in our cannabis laws. My colleagues, it is time for us to take action and make sure Victoria is leading the way on this issue. We need to look at how we can better regulate the access to and use of cannabis, both medicinally and socially, while also prioritising public health with effective education programs and early intervention initiatives.

We must not forget those affected by prohibition who have been unfairly criminalised due to outdated policies and laws. I stand here today to start a dialogue around what meaningful change could look like, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those living in our communities. As the 2022 Penington Institute report *Cannabis in Australia* identifies, when it comes to cannabis laws Australia is long overdue for reform. The data show our current prohibition approach is not just failing, it is causing real harm. The cost of prohibition is also enormous in Australia: \$1.7 billion is spent on cannabis-related law enforcement and \$1.1 billion is spent on imprisonment alone. In Victoria there are roughly 10,000 cannabis-related arrests each year – 92 per cent are consumers charged with possession, and of those, one in 10 end up in prison. We know that this figure disproportionately represents young people; Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women; and folk from culturally diverse backgrounds. Victoria outlawed cannabis in 1928. That is nearly 100 years of a failed war on drugs policy. Let us not have future generations look back at us and think, ‘Why didn’t they do something?’

We should not forget those who are suffering from illnesses that can be eased with medicinal cannabis or the important economic opportunities that could be unlocked for Victoria through policy reform in this area. Let us open a meaningful discussion about how we can regulate cannabis to improve the lives of all Victorians. By having an educated dialogue we will gain tremendous insight into what feasible steps need to be taken to bring an end to prohibition. We could see this progressive state establish world-class cannabis laws while creating opportunities for economic growth and stability and quashing profits of organised crime. I look forward to working with each of you to make these important changes a reality.

Finally, I would like to thank my darling Renee, who has supported, loved and encouraged me every step of the way. A living legend and an incredible community advocate in her own right, Renee played a key role in the marriage equality Yes campaign and continues to contribute her time and energy to the wider LGBTIQ community, both personally and professionally. I am so grateful for the beautiful life we have created together, along with our two cats Minnie Riperton and Chiquitita. We love you. I would like to say a huge thankyou to all of my family, friends and chosen family who have put up with me banging on about politics for so long. I thank you for the ongoing support.

In closing I would like to acknowledge my colleagues in this chamber. We may have differences of opinion, beliefs, experiences and backgrounds; however, we share a common goal, and that is that we all want what is best for our community. That is the beauty of democracy. My style is to be collaborative, open minded and open hearted in my conduct which I bring to this place. Victoria is a progressive state, and it is time we got on with this.

Members applauded.

Sitting suspended 4:20 pm until 4:36 pm.

Rikkie TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (16:36): I stand here before you all today to deliver my inaugural speech, and with that I am ready to break the mould. I will start off a little differently and ask you all to immediately think of what first comes to mind when you look at me. Did you see an Australian, or did you place me into a minority group, such as by age, class, race, gender, culture or religion? If you initially placed me as one of the latter, then I am here to prove you otherwise. I am an Australian, and a proud one at that. Regardless of my minor details, above all else I stand here as an Australian. Just as each and every one of us here today, I am a true-blue Aussie.

‘What defines an Australian?’, you may ask. To me an Australian is a person who values, respects and treasures this nation and culture as their sacred own. I stand here as an Australian with over 60,000 years of this land’s history running through my veins. But that does not make me any more or any less Australian than anybody else who calls our great nation home. You see, Australian culture has evolved over the generations. As we added more diversity we added to the rich tapestry of Australian culture. With this I ask of this chamber and all my fellow Victorians: as we add to our unique Australian culture, please do not lose any of it on the way. Do not erase our history, culture and uniqueness as we pave our own path through this chapter in our story. Allow it to evolve as Australians see fit. Do not force them the way that you currently are. Accept people’s differences, embrace their liberties and trust that through our diversity our communities will find a mass of similarities that strengthen Victorian society.

It may come as a shock to many, but I love people – all people. Already individuals in this chamber have stood in front of the media claiming that I am a racist without even giving me the opportunity to introduce myself. To them I have this to say: I forgive you. I forgive you for your hasty and ill-informed words. I forgive you for failing to properly represent your constituents and for falling victim to the petty name-calling that unfortunately so many modern-day politicians fall victim to. I forgive you, and I will work with you – all of you – to serve Northern Victoria and all Victorians to the absolute best of my abilities. I am not here to get lost in the web of political society. I am not here to forget who I am truly here for.

For my whole life I never quite felt at home, but when I moved to northern Victoria I knew I had finally found home. I fit into the community and culture like it was made for me. The community spirit is second to none in northern Victoria. They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, I have found the perfect village to raise my own two children and their peers alike.

To find your village after feeling so out of place for your entire life is pure bliss. From the diverse environments and weather patterns to the wholesome community spirit, northern Victoria was love at first sight for me. If your tractor has broken down, then a neighbour will be right around with theirs to help out in no time. If there is a single parent doing it tough, then there is a family offering to help out with babysitting while said parent heads off to work. If the kids’ sporting team or school needs cash, then the community throws a barbecue and fundraises like crazy. If there is a flood, fire or drought, then the whole community pulls together and we get through it as one. It is these people that inspire me every single day to do what I do – not famous celebrities, powerful businesspeople or the noisiest of politicians but the residents that make my home the perfect community it is to live in. These are the people I strive to be like – hardworking, no-fuss, honest people.

Northern Victoria is just as diverse as the rest of this state, but we do have our own unique qualities to add to Victoria, from Victoria’s own forgotten Queensland-like oasis in the far north-west, where Mildura is a treasure to find when you are trudging along in the outback, to the history-clad township of Beechworth, hiding in the pristine mountains to the east. Along the mighty Murray we have the most complex irrigation system in the Southern Hemisphere set up to enable our producers to run the food bowl that not only feeds this state but also exports our produce to other countries far and wide. As spectacular as this sounds, unfortunately the mismanagement of our waterways, government interference and red and green tape are the reasons I find myself here today.

I was only new to town in 2018 when the drought decided to move in as well. After 12 months of owning our own farm and struggling to produce with soaring water prices, I noticed it was not just my family that were struggling to work through it. I jumped into action when I noticed there were generational farms shutting down, schools closing their doors for good and townships turning into ghost towns. Nature had gone quiet. The trees had stopped singing. Cicadas were silent, and even locusts were nowhere to be seen. I could not understand why all of this prime agricultural land was barren when the river was thumping massive amounts of water downstream. I know better now. I know where the problem-makers are. I will continue my fight to see water returned to the land no matter where I am, be it here, out in the field or with the cooperation of others. We all deserve to have

access to affordable, fresh and local produce, but we cannot grow it without water. My irrigation communities can grow the most amazing produce on the face of the planet if we simply work with them, cut the red tape and let them get back on their feet.

I would like to briefly touch on an issue that many perceive as a topic to falsely brand my party racist: immigration. When we say our policy is net zero immigration, many everyday Victorians assume that means none at all. No. It simply means that we wish to see that immigration numbers do not exceed the amount of those leaving Victoria. It is not about race or culture, it is about numbers. It is a resource policy. With homelessness numbers rapidly increasing, schools full and hospitals with no beds, we have a serious issue with our current population. It is outright cruel to add more people to the population of those already struggling to get by. When working – yes, working – families are forced to live in their car due to no homes being available, we have a serious problem. When children are turned away from hospital without any care, we have a problem. We cannot add more people to our population until we have these issues sorted out. Like I said earlier, I love people – people from all cultures and corners of the earth fascinate me – but I cannot stand by and add to the suffering of those who rely on me to represent them, the people who are already here.

I am a servant to the people of Northern Victoria first and foremost. These people are telling me of their struggles to find homes and schools and gain medical care. They are telling me the waitlists are extraordinary. I cannot let them down by supporting an increase in immigration. As much as I would love to see those in other parts of the world end their suffering, I have many in my own constituency suffering through a lot of the same issues those in Third World countries are going through: homelessness, malnourishment, water contamination, poverty, domestic abuse, isolation – the list goes on. I have to ensure my constituency is sound before I can support an increase in immigration. Victorians are currently screaming out over the soaring costs of living, housing costs and the material shortages accompanying them, grocery costs, energy costs, fuel costs and taxes – so many taxes. Sometimes these problems are not fixed easily, but sometimes they are. Sometimes all it takes is allowing people to collect wood from the side of the road or state forests, to fish in our waterways, to fix dirt roads with their own earthmoving equipment, to clean out a blocked drain or to build a shed and live in it. State and local governments' overreach on people's lives and their ability to get by has exceeded the bounds. We are literally being choked in red and green tape.

Climate change did not start the catastrophic bushfires in 2019. The legislation stopping fire crews from practising safe spot burning – or back-burning when I was in the RFS – during the off-season was to blame there. These fires ravaged the east coast of Australia because of the fuel load on the ground. If your legislation was to protect the flora and fauna of these forests, then you did a splendid job of wiping them all out in one hit. This has now burdened regional communities with insane rebuilding costs that will take years to recover. This is a perfect example of how unnecessary government interference backfires and causes more harm to our constituents. These constituents are locals in their areas, many of them for generations. They know their land and environments better than anyone else – especially those of us here clad in suits and running our mouths. These locals do not want to destroy or pillage their natural resources; they simply want to manage and not waste what is available to help them get by in life.

If you have not worked it out by now, I am passionate about the people I represent. But I am a good person. I will listen, discuss and try to find a healthy balance here in the chamber – or out of it – with my parliamentary colleagues. Many of you have approached me and introduced yourselves, and some are now even working on becoming my dear friends. For those still hesitant, what you have just seen of me is a good little nibble. Cross my constituents in the wrong way, and I will bite. But that is what we are all here for, right? It is to serve our constituents, to give them the opportunity to live their best possible life through sound and fair governance. I am fiercely protective of those I value, and I value northern Victorians wholeheartedly. Since His Royal Highness King Charles III has not dropped me a line, I can only assume this is what he expects of me. To serve him, I must serve my constituency,

which I am more than happy to do – and I will do a damn fine job at it. I warned you all this would be short and punchy, just like me.

I would like to give a special mention to Mr Richard Hopkins. You have allowed me to grow, learn and blossom with all your ever-patient support. You saw in me something I had not even yet discovered myself. Thank you for learning to speak my language and explain things to me so that I could easily understand. If I could create the perfect father, there would be a lot of you in the mix. I am so very grateful for your existence overall as a human being and even more so as a mentor throughout these past several years of knowing you. I do not think I would be standing here today if it was not for you and your constant support. Thank you so very much.

Dani, Jodi, James and Warren, I am so very grateful that you have been there to create the awesome team I was blessed with when I was given an office. If anyone is to be envious of me for anything, you four are it. I got the cream of the crop of staffers.

Aaron, Laylla and Emmett – sorry, guys, but Mum and the missus are currently busy for the next four years at least. I will fit you into the calendar when I can. No, in all honesty, Aaron, thank you for the support. I know it is not easy having such a strong character for a wife, but at least it is never boring. You knew I was going to be a handful from the start, but I am sure you are enjoying the journey we are taking as we go. Hang in there, mate. It will be worth it in the end. Laylla and Emmett, I did not know what to expect when you two made me a mum, but thank you for allowing me the freedom to be the mum I am today. You guys allow me to be the fun, crazy, spontaneous and loving mother I am every day. Just know that everything I do now is to ensure that you and your generation are handed a better country and future than the one my generation was handed. I see a massive mess that we need to clean up – all of my generation needs to clean up – to hand over to you kids when the time comes. So just like any good mum, I am going to get cracking on that job.

I am going to take this opportunity to finish off by thanking all of those who travelled near and far to support me. Thank you to my fellow MPs, who have graced me with patience and respectful attention, and thank you to all of the parliamentary staff who have made this transition so welcoming. From the chocolate fairies hiding out in the library to team Buster Cat at the entrance, each and every one of the staff here at Victorian Parliament has been an absolute pleasure to deal with. I look forward to sharing at least the next four years, a large chunk of my life, with all of you, and once again, thank you, President.

Members applauded.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:02): I would like to start by thanking God for the honour of standing here today, and I would especially like to thank the people of the Western Metropolitan Region for trusting me to represent them in Parliament. It is also my honour to be the first Māori Australian member of the Victorian Parliament.

They say that nobody achieves success alone, and that is certainly true in my case. So, firstly, I would like to thank Andrew, my husband of 17 years. You have been a humble and relentless force for good in every sphere of your life, not just mine. You are the man that I admire most in this world, and with you as my husband I have healed and gone from strength to strength in every way. As a father to our children, I could not have asked for one more dedicated, wise or loving than you.

To our four children, Eva-Rose, Will, Lydija and Leah, thank you for turning all my fears about motherhood upside down. I want you to know that these last seven years, when I was able to stay home with you almost full-time, have been the greatest, the most meaningful and the most joy-filled years of my life. You showed me that there is no career, no cause, no adventure that could ever be as inspiring or as satisfying as the simple, ordinary days that I spent at home being your mother.

Thank you so much to all my friends and supporters who have come here. Thank you to all the Liberal MPs and the people on our team. I appreciate your presence. Without your encouragement, prayers,

babysitting, reminder texts and endless patience I really would not be here today. I would also like to thank those former students, especially my rainbow students, who reached out to me over the last few years when they saw me being slandered in the media. It meant so much to me that you went out of your way to get in touch, to reassure me that you knew the truth and to encourage me to keep going. It is also nice to know that my lessons in critical analysis paid off.

And last but not least I really would like to say an extra special thankyou to those who came to support me today despite the fact that, politically speaking, we sit on opposite sides of the fence. Our relationships are so precious to me because they are a rare breed and rely wholly on genuine mutual respect and tolerance. When I was being slandered in the media and even by some MPs on your own side, you stood by me even though you knew it was going to cost you dearly in this age of self-righteous hive mind politics. You are some of the bravest and most principled people that I have ever met, and I am honoured to call you my friends and my sometimes political allies.

I love the western suburbs of Melbourne. Robert Menzies once said that the real life of this nation is:

... to be found in the homes of people who are nameless and unadvertised, and who, whatever their individual religious conviction or dogma, see in their children their greatest contribution ...

And I think his words are a lovely image of our lives in the west. Everything revolves around family and community; we speak many languages and we follow many faiths but we have so much in common. We work hard, we juggle the bills, we hate traffic and we love our kids. Whether we were born here or not, whether we are descended from migrants or were asylum seekers, this is our home, and as one of my heroes Jacinta Price says, 'We are all Australians.'

It is no secret that Labor views the Western Metropolitan Region that I represent as their territory, but that is why I believe that the people of the west have actually become the forgotten people of Victoria. Menzies described them as people whose wider wellbeing was of no concern to trade unions but who are not wealthy enough to hire the lawyers and financial advisers to protect them from excessive taxes and government interference in their private lives. And that is the reality for us out in the west. Our schools are overcrowded, our roads are underfunded and our hospitals are understaffed and underfunded – or they exist only in the forward estimates. The western suburbs are used as a dumping ground for rubbish, toxic soil and chemicals, which catch on fire, leak out or pile up above the horizon. Soon we are going to have massive transmission towers crisscrossing our suburbs and new flight paths right over our homes. But when election time has come and gone, we find that Labor's promises to fix these things are as forgotten as we are. I look forward to reminding the good people of the Western Metropolitan Region, together with Trung and my wonderful lower house colleagues, that they do matter and that the Liberal Party has not forgotten them.

Some of you may be surprised to learn that I was actually born and bred on the political left. In fact I come from a long and distinguished line of union leaders, card-carrying Labor Party members and Labor MPs. My great-grandfather was John Joseph Holland, a western suburbs Labor MP for over 30 years and a councillor for the City of Melbourne. JJ Holland Park and what used to be known as the JJ Holland housing commission flats were also named after him. When he died, his son Kevin, who was also a union leader and a Member of the Order of Australia, took over his seat as a Labor Party MP. My father was a unionised teacher, and my mother was a nurse who worked her way up to be a leader in the Australian nursing federation. Paddy Garrity himself offered to host my wedding in Trades Hall. My husband was horrified. As my mum likes to say, I come from good Catholic Labor stock, and I just love her too much to remind her that in the mid-1950s many Catholics were actually expelled from the Labor Party for protesting the communist infiltration of their unions.

So how did someone like me, a 'Labor Party princess', as one of your MPs has put it, end up standing here in this place as a Liberal MP? As it happens, there is a long tradition in Australian politics of those raised on the gospel of unity who come to learn firsthand the value of liberty and then switch to the Liberal side of politics. Sadly, they are often referred to as Labor rats, but in fact they were just ordinary people who foresaw the problems that are now plaguing all political parties that refuse to tolerate

independent thinking and the tragic consequences of idolising economies that are controlled by the state. They are ordinary people like Joseph Cook, who worked in an English coalmine from nine years old and after becoming a New South Wales Labor MP went on to become the first Liberal Prime Minister to win an outright majority at a federal election; like Joseph Lyons, a humble schoolteacher like me, who renounced Labor's socialist economics to successfully steer Australia through the Great Depression; and then there is my personal favourite, Warren Mundine – or Uncle Wazza, as my children like to call him. Warren went from being president of the Labor Party to a staunch Liberal and chairman of the Conservative Political Action Network Australia. I too am heir to this tradition. I grew up idolising the left, the unions and the Labor Party. The ideals of unity and equality still resonate with me, but when taken to extremes these ideals have a dark side.

As a teenager I witnessed firsthand the corruption and the brutal, coordinated bullying of anyone who does not think and act in unity with the left. There are many stories that I could tell, but one stands out. A woman that I loved and admired quietly refused to take part in the corrupt misuse of union funds. Enraged by this, the union leaders ruthlessly bullied her, blacklisted her from working in Victoria for over 20 years and destroyed her career. Even after these bullies were successfully sued for their behaviour, they kept their jobs and their fines were paid by the very same union whose money they had been siphoning off – for guess who? For years afterwards I would see them on TV being publicly praised as champions of the working class. Now of course we need unions. We have been hearing all week about the wonderful work that they have done, but they need to be apolitical. Our workers deserve better.

If you look up in this beautiful and historic chamber, you will see eight figures, all holding different items representing different ideals – truth, glory, justice, mercy, wisdom, architecture, abundance and unity. Unity is shown holding a circle of chains, but those chains were originally designed to appear broken in half. And what is more, 'Unity' is not her original name. Unity's real name is in fact 'Liberty'.

Liberty's reformed chains of oppression are the best illustration I can think of for the dangers of left-wing ideology. That is why I turned away from it. Because individual rights and liberties must never be sacrificed for coerced unity. I believe that every individual is unique, endowed with human dignity and worthy of our care and respect. And those on every side of politics care in exactly the same way. We have all heard it this week, and I do not deny that. But too often they have been willing to sacrifice individual human rights in the pursuit of collective goals. They argue that the end justifies the means, but as a Liberal, I believe that only by just means can we achieve a just outcome. That is why I believe in the freedom to worship, to think and, as my dear friend Abdullah put it, the right to disagree well forever.

I believe in freedom from compelled speech, the freedom to travel outside my own suburb, the freedom to meet and embrace my family members and the freedom to accept or refuse medical treatment. These freedoms are under threat today, and as these last few years have proven, if we do not cherish them, if we do not fight for them, they will be taken away. Rights and liberties must systematically constrain governments, not the other way around.

So that is why I am a Liberal, but politics was not my original plan. I had chosen a career in teaching, and I was loving it. I felt incredibly honoured that parents would entrust their children to me. But I began to be very concerned about the things that I was being told to teach. Lessons on tolerance were being replaced with lessons on inclusion. It was not enough anymore to just accept each other's differences with respect. Now students were required to affirm and celebrate beliefs that they just did not share. Perfectly reasonable moral and religious differences were being reframed as discriminatory and intolerant, and a new vocabulary was introduced categorising people as allies or enemies.

Instead of being inspired by history's heroes, students were being chastised and even told to stand up in class and apologise for historical crimes that they had neither committed nor condoned. They were told that the physical world is on the brink of doom, but rather than being assigned research projects

to find practical solutions, they were being assigned activism as work, including social media awareness-raising campaigns, ideological fundraisers and even attendance at protests during school hours.

Instead of being taught the life-changing value of grit and character, my most vulnerable and disadvantaged students were being weighed down and discouraged with spectres of insurmountable social forces all arrayed against them – capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy. I remember one boy sitting at the back of my class with no pencil case and no books. I did my rounds of the desks, and when I got to him, I smiled and said, ‘Would you like any help with your work?’ He just grinned at me cheekily and said he did not need to do his schoolwork because when he grew up, he was going to be a gangster. I grinned right back and said, ‘Well, I’m not sure that Australia has much of a gangster industry. Do you have a plan B?’

And he laughed and enjoyed that and we got to chatting, but during that chat I learned that he wanted to be a gangster because he had escaped to Australia from a war-torn country only to be told repeatedly by his teachers that Australia and Australians were racist, and this poor boy of 13 or 14 actually believed them. Here he was, safe in Australia, welcomed, happy in the classroom, unable to concentrate on his work, though, because he was scared of systemic racial violence. No child should be told that they are hated. The final straw, which compelled me to challenge the government head on, was discovering that school policies and curriculums had been radically altered to remove almost every child safeguarding standard that we had had. Primary school children were being subjected to erotic sexual content. Female students no longer had the right to single-sex sports teams, toilets or change rooms, and teachers like me were being forced to lie to parents about their children, who were secretly living as one gender at school and another gender at home. I realised then that my teaching career was over, because I simply would not ever do the things that I was being asked to do. I would never ask students to tell the class which sexual experiences they had had and which they were willing to do. I would never tell girls to bind their breasts. I would never accuse gay students of being transphobic. I would never tell my female students that they had to tolerate a male teacher supervising their change rooms, and I was never, ever going to lie to parents about what was going on with their own children at school. But I also knew that if I spoke out I was going to be vilified and that I would never work in a public school again, and that is exactly what happened – but so be it.

I wrote articles. I did interviews. I gave talks all across Victoria. I worked with brave women and men from the left – women like Jasmine, Holly, Stassia and Kat. I worked with LGB organisations and free-speech organisations and with doctors, lawyers, brave journalists like Bernard Lane and amazing women like Claire Chandler and Kath Deves. I worked with people of all faiths and none. I worked with betrayed parents and shattered detransitioners. We put everything else aside and we worked together, and every single one of us was attacked for shining a light on these issues. Eventually I got myself elected as a local government councillor in Melton. Councils are responsible for providing change rooms, toilets and all sorts of domestic violence and women’s services. So I asked whether it was legal to provide these single-sex services and facilities anymore because biological males could just identify as women. I asked the council officers; they did not know. I asked the lawyers; they did not know. I asked every single local government council in Victoria, and not a single one of them knew either, but almost all of them knew unequivocally that it was transphobic just to ask. I asked the gender equality commissioner and the LGBTIQ+ commissioner, and all that they could tell me was that some men are women, but you are not allowed to ask which ones are which because that would be discriminatory. They also told me that I should encourage any women who were unhappy about this, including religious women and victims of sexual assault, to ‘be more tolerant’. I tried to ask the human rights commissioner, but their office told me that I would never, ever – ever – get a meeting with them. So I asked the Victorian Government Solicitor’s Office, and they handballed my question to the Attorney-General of Victoria, who has to this day failed to answer. So now here I am.

Democracy in Victoria is almost 170 years old, and one of the reasons for its enduring success is that we are blessed with this Council, this house of review. So I am just going to get right to work by

quickly reviewing three areas of the law, and I am going to focus on women and children because that is what the Governor's speech focused on. First of all, sex-based rights. Women and girls are suffering in Victoria because this government cannot or will not define what a female is, and as a result every woman and every girl in Victoria has lost the right to enjoy female-only sports, female-only change rooms and countless other female-only activities. As a result, what most women would consider to be sexual harassment and indecent exposure is now legal in Victoria. As a result, there is right now at this very moment a twice-convicted male rapist housed with the female prisoners in my area in the Dame Phyllis Frost correctional facility. They are the most vulnerable women of all. Surely there must be ways to ensure the safety and dignity of trans people which do not trample on the rights of women and girls. I call upon this government to immediately reinstate sex-based rights in the law.

Secondly, children in brothels – I was very glad to hear that industry called 'the adult industry', because children do not belong anywhere near it. Yet this government has made it legal to have children inside brothels in Victoria. That is right – in commercial brothels newborn babies and children up to 18 months of age are allowed on the premises. In home-based brothels children of any age are allowed inside. Devastated police officer friends of mine have told me that Victoria will now inevitably become the child rape capital of Australia. So again I call on the government to amend that act as well so that no child can be taken inside brothels of any kind in Victoria.

Thirdly, transgender affirmation practices on minors – this government has made it illegal for parents and clinicians of gender-dysphoric children to seek out any treatments at all, no matter how reasonable, if they are designed to naturally alleviate the dysphoric feelings and leave the child's body intact. In Victoria that is simply not allowed. In Victoria doctors will lose their medical licences and parents will lose their children unless they affirm and entrench that dysphoria via experimental conversion therapies which try to socially, surgically and hormonally convert boys into an approximation of girls and girls into an approximation of boys. It has been all over the media for at least five years. And despite the fact that these interventions have now been proven to be medically unjustifiable, irreversible and devastatingly harmful, ideologues continue to vilify and incite hatred towards anyone sounding the alarm. They even blame these whistleblowers for trans youth suicides, which is the most disgusting and cynical act of political exploitation I have ever seen. The devastated parents, the furious clinicians and most of all the heartbroken ex-trans youth whose health has vanished and whose bodies are scarred deserve justice. I call on this government to reinstate common sense and compassion and to conduct an open inquiry into gender affirmation practices in Victoria.

Members applauded.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:25): I move:

That the address-in-reply be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:25): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, government business, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:25): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Floods

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:25): (36) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and it concerns assistance and advice needed by the people of Rochester in dealing with insurance claims. The action that I seek is for the minister to deploy officers from Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) to Rochester for as long as is required to provide support and advice to residents attempting to navigate insurance claims to assist their recovery from the devastating flood event that impacted the town in October. The October flood event that impacted so much of the Goulburn Valley had a particularly devastating impact on the town of Rochester. This flood impacted those in the Murray Valley as well. It is estimated that the flood inundated or affected around 90 per cent of residential properties in the town and also vital emergency services infrastructure, including the Rochester and Elmore District Health Service and the Rochester police station. One local told me that the flood impacted 90 per cent of the houses but affected 100 per cent of the people in Rochester, and one can only imagine the heartache and pain that many Rochester people are still feeling as they attempt to rebuild their lives.

One aspect of the recovery for many residents of Rochester is dealing with their insurance companies regarding claims for repairs to their homes or businesses. While facing the monumental challenges that come with rebuilding their lives in the wake of the floods, many Rochester residents have reported what I would describe as more-than-difficult communications with their insurance companies. I have received reports of insurance companies encouraging their financially strapped clients to sign incomplete and inadequate scope-of-work documents that do not include the entirety of all repairs needed, leaving clients with a substantial shortfall to complete repairs. Residents have also complained about a lack of communication from insurance companies, technical language from companies that is not easily understood and insurance companies exerting pressure on clients to accept cash settlements to settle claims, usually to the financial detriment of the client.

In addition, residents cannot access bank loans to commence repairs as insurance companies are not issuing insurance policies that are needed to secure the loan. This also affects the sale or purchase of any properties, as the banks require insurance for the purchaser to secure a loan. The people of Rochester are already in a vulnerable and fragile emotional state, and it is imperative that they are supported and know their legal rights when dealing with insurance companies and other agencies. I have been informed that only two consumer affairs officers have visited Rochester, for just one day, and this was in the very early days after the flood event, before the full extent of the damage was known. Rochester residents need access to the expertise of CAV staff now, and I urge the minister to deploy a full team of CAV officers into Rochester immediately to help the many residents navigate the insurance policy area.

Black Forest Drive, Woodend

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (17:28): (37) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. The action I seek is an assurance that measures to be put in place on Black Forest Drive in Woodend will substantially improve safety for cyclists and do so in a manner consistent with Austroads guidelines. I know this road well and drive on it almost daily. It is a hotspot for near misses, wildlife strikes and collisions. Just last week I met with members of the Macedon Ranges Cycling Club who expressed their concerns about the dangerous road, which is regularly used by cyclists between Gisborne and Woodend. They tragically lost a member of their club cycling on Black Forest Drive in October last year when he was struck by a car from behind. He is not the first cyclist to die on this road.

The government and Regional Roads Victoria are currently considering plans to upgrade and improve Black Forest Drive. Initially there was a proposal to have dedicated bike lanes along the full length of Black Forest Drive. During community presentations, Regional Roads officers made it clear that bike lanes along the full length of Black Forest Drive were a necessary safety measure, they would be going ahead and they were also budgeted for. However, this was reverted to a new proposal for the retention

of two vehicle lanes in both directions, with only short and discontinuous provision of bike lanes. This is not consistent with Austroads guidelines, will do nothing to improve rider safety and risks another tragedy occurring. Macedon Ranges cyclists and those who travel to the area for cycling need assurances that safety improvements will be implemented for them to ride on Black Forest Drive. I hope the minister can support this request.

Short-stay accommodation

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:30): (38) My adjournment matter tonight is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs concerning Victoria's worsening rental affordability crisis. I call on the government to regulate the short-stay industry in Victoria. Our housing system is broken. Demand for public housing is hopelessly outstripping available stock, with more than 100,000 Victorians waiting for a home. Tens of thousands more are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We are also years into a rental crisis, with conditions for tenants only getting worse. Rents are skyrocketing, demand for rentals is soaring and the vacancy rate is at a record low here in Victoria.

Short-stay or Airbnb-style accommodation is making the rental crisis worse by decreasing the number of available rentals and further entrenching housing as a tool for wealth generation, instead of it being a basic human right. Many governments both internationally and here in Australia have already begun to regulate the short-stay accommodation sector, but in Victoria it is almost entirely unregulated. I call on the government to regulate this industry. We need to implement a 90-day-per-year cap on renting out entire homes as short-stay accommodation, stronger regulatory powers over short-stay properties for owners corporations and a mandatory public register for short-stay operators.

Here in Victoria successive governments have failed to protect renters from soaring rent prices and predatory lease agreements that they agree to out of desperation. The situation is dire. It has been dire for many years. As a renter I can appreciate how the targeted rental support measures implemented by the Andrews government in the early stages of the pandemic were crucial reforms that saved many people from homelessness, but so many also felt the crushing impact of those measures being ripped away when Victoria went back to business as usual, ignoring the housing affordability crisis, the result being renters getting screwed. I am hopeful that it will not take another pandemic for this government to see that people are desperate and crying out for reform. We need to take meaningful action to help tackle the state's rental crisis. We need to tip the power balance further towards renters.

Anam Cara House Geelong

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:33): (39) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to a request for the upcoming budget. I am hoping that she will be able to speak to the Treasurer about an issue that has been raised with me. I was hoping to visit Anam Cara House in Geelong prior to the election but unfortunately could not get to visit. But I did have the pleasure of going down there last week and having a wonderful site visit, and I want to thank Adrian Hart and his team, who are doing a tremendous job with this very good initiative that helps with providing services, including palliative care and respite care, for so many within the Geelong region. Anam Cara has a unique model of care. As I said, it provides palliative support services for those diagnosed with a life-limiting illness as well as their families. It is in partnership with Deakin University, and it undertakes research. It does a whole range of things, and it is in the process of the finalisation of being built. As I said, I went to visit it last week, and there were some parts of the facility that had not been completed. When I was going through it there were a number of beds, so there are four palliative beds that are required to be opened, with a total of 12 beds that the money that I am requesting would go towards assisting. It would also support the other beds that are running and the operational day-care services that the facility has.

It makes no sense that this facility that is requesting or needing this money be short-changed, because of the pressure it is taking off the existing facilities in the Geelong region, and I really want to make the point that the work I saw by those carers in there last week was tremendous. There were a couple of day patients in there that were getting respite, they were having programs, and the whole team that

was coming around them was just truly tremendous. The funding that they require is \$1.99 million in this upcoming budget, and I would urge the health minister to speak to the Treasurer and other colleagues to ensure that this community palliative care provider is provided with that funding to get those beds finished and to get the operation up and running to its best capacity.

Early childhood education

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:36): (40) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Ingrid Stitt. The education of our next generation is so important for the development of life skills that will set them up for the future. I visited many early childhood education centres in my region and have spoken with staff and families who have told me how excited they are for the rollout of free three- and four-year-old kinder, meaning more choice, more flexibility and more money saved. My question to Minister Stitt is to ask if she could kindly update me on how the free three- and four-year-old kinder will assist families tackling the rising cost of living in the Northern Metropolitan Region.

Child protection

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:36): (41) My adjournment matter this afternoon is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. I could not believe my eyes when I was reading the *Guardian* this morning, as I do every morning, and I saw in the *Guardian* this morning that apparently the government was reintroducing a child protection bill – the Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I thought to myself, ‘Is this one of the many child protection bills that we started debating last year that we on this side of the house indicated we would wholeheartedly support but then the government pulled for reasons unbeknownst to me?’ And lo and behold it was. So it was lovely to see Minister Blandthorn out and about – she is not allowed out and about often; however, she was out and about today – saying that the government is going to do something to reduce the shocking over-representation of Indigenous people in care here in Victoria. That is an excellent thing. This is something, as the minister was good enough to acknowledge in question time today, that the Liberals have always supported.

But there are other bills that were perfectly good bills that the government brought forward in the last term of Parliament that then they ditched – for strange reasons unbeknownst to me – that I would like to see resurrected. And in particular my adjournment matter tonight is for the minister to resurrect the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Child Protection) Bill 2021. This week it was 500 days since that bill was first introduced to Parliament, and on the bill’s introduction I made it absolutely plain to the child protection minister at the time – it is hard to remember who it was; it was five child protection ministers ago, but whoever it was, I said it to them – that we were going to support it. I said to them that every single Liberal and National member in the upper house is going to vote for it. And at the time if you added up every single Liberal and National Party member and every government member, well then you would have gotten a clear majority. And so I said, ‘We’re all going to vote for it.’

However, what happened at that time is that the leader of the Greens party, Dr Ratnam, had the temerity to suggest that she might seek to move an amendment – how dare she – regarding raising the age of criminal responsibility. Now, I am very pleased that soon we are going to be able to have a discussion in this place on that incredibly important matter, and it is great to see the Minister for Corrections and Minister for Youth Justice at the table. We have a shared goal in this house – I am sure we do – of reducing the appalling over-representation of Indigenous kids in care, ending that dreadful pipeline whereby so many vulnerable children move almost inexorably from child protection through into youth justice, and one suggestion as to how we might do this is to raise the age of criminal responsibility. It is absolutely worth discussing, as so many other measures are worth discussing – for example, the excellent ones that Mr Mulholland flagged in his maiden speech. So I think we know why in actual fact the government did not want to move forward with the children, youth and families

bill which was introduced 500 days ago in an election year. But there is not an election for four years now. That bill was important 500 days ago. It is important today. The minister should bring that one back too.

Stroke Association of Victoria

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (17:39): (42) I call on the Minister for Health to provide ongoing funding to the Stroke Association of Victoria so that stroke support centres in regional Victoria can continue to operate beyond June this year. Last year I was speaking with a lady at my work who suffered a stroke that night and ended up in hospital. Now her days are full of appointments with speech therapists, physios and other specialists. Stroke can happen to any of us at any age, but regional Australians are 17 per cent more likely to suffer a stroke. Without warning stroke can impact your ability to move or speak. Many people lose their confidence and become isolated. As well as the physical challenges, there are mental pressures like who is going to pay the mortgage and who is going to look after the kids. A stroke occurs in Australia every 19 minutes. This year it is estimated that 7000 Victorians will have a stroke for the first time. Stroke is one of the leading causes of death in Australia. Over 2000 people die from stroke in Victoria each year.

Last week I met with members of the Bendigo support centre of the Stroke Association of Victoria – people like Ron, Shelley, Dion and Lara, whose lives changed in a single day. Super fit at 44 and out running, a man suffered a stroke that caused paralysis, and he had to give up work. There was a lady who lost all movement in her arm and has lived with it for 17 years and another who owned a business who woke up one morning struggling to speak. I met a lady who has had three strokes and shows no physical signs but now struggles to read and experiences significant fatigue. They all value getting together through the local stroke support centre. The impact is not just felt by those who have actually experienced stroke, it is felt by partners and families as well. A spouse who is perfectly capable one day may then need 24-hour care.

For many years volunteers created their own self-help groups because there was no support available, but in 2017 the Stroke Association of Victoria helped bridge the gap. Today stroke support centres operate in Bendigo, Shepparton, Ballarat, Geelong and Morwell. In June this year funding for these centres will run out. Local support centres have been put on notice, as the government plans to evaluate the program in October – far too late. These support centres are vital. Local facilitators help ease the pressure on hospitals, coordinate social activities and provide support to find a job. I call on the Minister for Health to provide ongoing funding to the Stroke Association of Victoria so that local support centres can continue to support people and families impacted by stroke.

St Vincent's Care Eltham

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:42): (43) I rise to discuss the decommissioning of the independent living units at St Vincent's Care Services in Eltham. The action I seek is for the Minister for Housing to meet with the 52 residents that are impacted by the decommissioning and for the minister to obtain from St Vincent's the independent advice they are relying upon to make the decision to decommission the homes that those 52 people currently occupy. Further, I seek action from the minister to assure those 52 Australians that they will be no worse off at the conclusion of the decommissioning.

The history of this area and this particular service goes back some years. It goes back in fact to a point in time in 2016 when Syrian and Iraqi refugees were housed. A large number of those were relocated some time ago. At that point in time the Commonwealth government had agreed to accept in the order of 12,000 refugees. Today the rationale given to those people – who now have established homes, friendships and connections with the community and access to health services and all sorts of facilities provided by the community and by the council itself – is that their arrangements, their homes, are unfit for service, unfit for occupancy, and that they require significant ongoing maintenance. The figure that is being used is in the order of \$20 million to rebuild the housing on the existing site. St Vincent's have advised that they do not have those funds. In fact they state, 'We do not have access to those

funds', and therefore they have made a decision as a not-for-profit to discontinue those services. Of course you would understand that for those affected this is a stressful and a fearful period, which is why what I have asked the minister to do is so important to the people in that community.

I had the good fortune on Monday of this week to meet with near to 30, 35, maybe 40 of the residents affected. They have very specific needs. It is also complicated because at least half, if not more, speak Arabic alone. I was assisted on the day by a translator, but it is also clear to me that these citizens will require not only project support from St Vincent's but importantly that it be bilingual, because otherwise they have every fear that they will not receive the sort of accommodation that we would like them to be entitled to and I think that all Victorians would expect.

Lake Wendouree lighting project

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (17:46): (44) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and it relates to the Lake Wendouree lighting project. The action that I seek from the minister is to immediately halt the project in order to meet with concerned residents so a more appropriate lighting solution can be found.

Members of the Ballarat community are rightly concerned with the lake lighting project at Lake Wendouree. If the project is to meet the Australian standard for lighting, the standard stipulates that lighting around the lake has to occur 27 to 30 metres between each lighting pole. However, this directly conflicts with the tree protection policy which states that no structure can be built within 12 lengths of the width of a tree, oddly enough. Holes must be hand drilled – not using a machine – to minimise the disturbance to trees as well.

I hope that the minister will take quick and fast action to ensure that the project is halted and meaningful consultation can happen with locals so we can get the right outcome not just an outcome. Let us get the right outcome, because we have only got one shot at it. If we do not, we are stuck with it for a long time, with potentially many, many less trees as well.

Mickleham Road duplication

Evan Mulholland (Northern Metropolitan) (17:47): (45) Tonight I seek the action of the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure for my community in Melbourne's north. The action I seek is for the minister to investigate the fast-tracking of the Mickleham Road duplication between Greenvale and Craigieburn. Traffic congestion in the city's north continues to be a big problem for my local residents. As they will tell you, Mickleham Road is a bottleneck, especially when you head north from Somerton Road towards Craigieburn, and with plans for a new housing estate in Craigieburn West the matter is only going to get worse.

So I was glad when the former coalition federal Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg, agreed to fund \$109.5 million towards the duplication in last year's federal budget, and the Victorian government followed up that commitment with \$104 million – and credit to Hume City Council for their advocacy for this funding. But locals believe they are being short-changed by the state government to go less than halfway of the stretch to Craigieburn. The Victorian government announced that under stage 1 they will spend over \$213 million to duplicate Mickleham Road by only 1.6 kilometres – or only 1 mile in the old language – for over \$200 million, from Somerton Road north to Dellamere Boulevard.

Hume City Council reckon they can do the project for much less than that. In fact I met with a delegation from Hume City Council a couple of weeks ago about it, including the mayor Joseph Haweil. They told me that their own engineers had costed it for much less, around \$145 million to duplicate Mickleham Road from Somerton Road not only to Craigieburn Road but past it up to Mount Ridley Road, and that a duplication from Somerton Road to Craigieburn Road could be completed within the \$213 million envelope.

Local councillor Jim Overend has been hot on this issue, saying the costings make no sense at all. If we were to go by the state government's estimate, the total cost would be \$1.3 billion. The minister has said to the council that their engineers have costed it, but one wonders whether they are different engineers than costed the stage 2 upgrade of 6.6 kilometres of Plenty Road in Mernda just in mid-2021 that cost over \$145 million or different engineers from the current Craigieburn Road upgrade which is costing \$300 million – yet they cannot do it within the \$213 million envelope for 1.6 kilometres. Is this because they have factored in cost overruns? Is this because of deals with perhaps the CFMEU? Curiously, the letter from the minister also touts that the \$213 million envelope has now blown out to \$222 million. I call on the minister to go back to the drawing board, follow the advocacy of Hume City Council and seek to fast-track this project.

Northcote High School

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:50): (46) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education and relates to a story in the *Age* newspaper on Saturday titled 'School's new chapter on First Nation's history,' and my learned colleague here Mr Mulholland will be most interested in this, I am sure. It described Northcote High School's invitation to Indigenous education expert Dr Al Fricker to audit the school's library and its 7000 books. The aim was to remove non-fiction titles deemed historically inaccurate or offensive. It resulted in 36 books being removed from the library and a further 12 titles being filed under a new restricted category. Any reference to Aboriginal people being nomads or hunter-gatherers, for example, was removed. My question is this: what right does one man have to decide what history is correct or incorrect? What right does one man, backed by one school, have to decide what version of history students need to learn? Students can disagree with the books, challenge them, debate them, as they should, but to remove them as if that part of history, that version of history does not exist is surely the antithesis to an inquiring education.

Some of the books were removed because they were almost 50 years old. One wonders if Northcote High School has a copy of the Bible even. Dr Fricker argues that:

We wouldn't accept science books being that old in the library, so why do we accept other nonfiction books to be that old ...

Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that science changes, history does not. These days even poor Roald Dahl is being censored. George Orwell's *1984* describes the party slogan:

Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past ...

Could one sentence better describe Northcote High School today? The school said it is absolutely about inclusivity. It is not, I contest. It is an exercise in exclusivity, excluding selected histories in favour of preferred versions of history. The school wants to create a culturally appropriate and safe library no less, but safe from what? The truth? Safe from challenging debates? Safe from inquiring minds? It is encouraging others to follow its example and is supported by the Victorian School Library Association. Given taxpayers have bought these books, paid for the librarians to put them on the shelves and for teachers to use them as part of broad learning, can the minister please advise whether all government schools in Victoria will be required to also undertake a cultural audit of libraries?

Suburban Rail Loop

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:54): (47) My adjournment is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister to join with me to meet with Heatherton residents concerned about the impact of the proposed Suburban Rail Loop stabling yard and to see what impact it is going to have on local sporting facilities, livability and the environment. The City of Kingston in the South-Eastern Region has continued to grow and develop, and with its population the demands for a significant new sporting facility have become urgent. Sporting needs include football, cricket, soccer, hockey, baseball, cycling and the development of more sporting opportunities for women and girls.

At the same time, local residents have been waiting for a chain of parks – a crucial open-space project to allow south-eastern residents to enjoy nature and the great outdoors, and it has been promised for about three decades. Over these three decades the City of Kingston has earmarked the Delta site, a prime piece of land in Heatherton abutting many homes and adjacent to the protected green wedge zone. But instead of using this land to support local sport, open space, livability and the environment, this government wants to rip it up, pave over it and use it as a stabling yard for trains. True to form, the government has forgone any meaningful community consultation. Groups like Move the Train Yard have been brushed off, and many residents are set to have their livability ruined and home values slashed. This has been ignored. Residents are right to be dismayed.

If the Liberal–National coalition had been elected to government, the local council would have received our commitment of \$20 million towards a new active recreation reserve at this site, and we would have sought to engage an alternative and far more suitable site for the stabling yards. But for now, the least the minister can do is come to my community – our community – and listen. I have already met with some of these residents, environmental groups and lobby groups, and I ask the minister to join me to hear our residents and work with them and not against them. So I seek this action from the minister: come with me; come and meet the people.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:57): There were 12 matters raised in the adjournment debate today: Ms Lovell to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Ms Purcell to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Puglielli to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health, Ms Watt to the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Dr Bach to the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, Ms Broad to the Minister for Health, Mr McGowan to the Minister for Housing, Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Mrs McArthur to the Minister for Education and Ms Hermans to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. I will make sure that all those are passed on to the relevant ministers for consideration.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:58 pm.