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Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 30 October 2024

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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Wednesday 30 October 2024

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

Business of the house

Orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:33): General business, order of the day 3, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents

Parliamentary departments

Reports 2023–24

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:34): I table, by leave, the reports 2023–24 of the Department of the Legislative Assembly and the Department of Parliamentary Services.

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Major Events Act 2009 – Major Sporting Event Orders for the:

International Test Cricket Matches to be held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) – 2024 to 2028

One Day International and Twenty20 Internationals to be held at Junction Oval – 2024 to 2028

One Day Internationals and Twenty20 Internationals matches to be held at Kardinia Park – 2024 to 2028

One Day Internationals and Twenty20 Internationals to be held at the MCG – 2024 to 2028

Twenty20 Domestic matches (including Men's Big Bash League and Women's Big Bash League) at the MCG – 2024 to 2028

Twenty20 Domestic matches (including Men's Big Bash League and Women's Big Bash League) at the Docklands Stadium – 2024 to 2028

Twenty20 Domestic matches (including Men's Big Bash League and Women's Big Bash League) at Junction Oval – 2024 to 2028

Twenty20 Domestic matches (including Men's Big Bash League and Women's Big Bash League) at Kardinia Park – 2024 to 2028

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 109, 113, 123

Victorian Inspectorate – Report 2023–24 – Ordered to be published.

Bills

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024

Council's agreement

The SPEAKER (09:34): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024 and the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024.

Proof

Motions

Government performance

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Melton for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen record debt, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to deliver what matters, such as the upgrade to Kurunjang Secondary College.

Leave refused.

Housing

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Allan Labor government has announced a crackdown on dubious bond claims without evidence to protect renters and condemns the Liberals for slashing $176,000 from tenants associations when they were in government.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:35): By leave, I move:

That this house condemns the member for Ringwood for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen record debt, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to deliver what matters, such as the upgrade to the Mullauna secondary college.

Leave refused.

Housing

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Allan Labor government has announced a ban on extra fees when tenants pay their rent and condemns the Liberals for voting against the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2018 with over 130 reforms when this bill was in the Assembly.

Leave refused.

Government performance

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Point Cook for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $194.9 million on community hospitals like the Point Cook Community Hospital, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions of dollars on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians money.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Liberals for trying to amend the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2018 in the Legislative Council to force renters to pay an additional two weeks rent on their bond.

Leave refused.

Proof

Government performance

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bass for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $42.2 million on the CFA capital upgrades program, keeping Victorians in the dark about billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians money.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that when the Liberals' dodgy amendments were defeated in the Legislative Council they voted against making renting fairer again.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for St Albans for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $1.7 million on Jackson School, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians money.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes when the Liberals were last in government every budget delivered significant cuts to housing assistance, social housing and support for disadvantaged Victorians to access the rental market.

Leave refused.

Government performance

David HODGETT (Croydon) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bayswater for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $315 million on the suburban roads upgrade, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians money.

Leave refused.

Housing

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Allan Labor government is the only party that has delivered over 130 reforms for renters, including bans on rental bidding, new minimum standards, no evictions without reason, allowable modification, the introduction of a portable bond scheme and cracking down on dodgy rental providers.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Niddrie for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $2.5 million on the Niddrie Primary School, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

PROOF

Opposition performance

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the member for Brighton for opposing more homes in Brighton just to get a media headline.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Box Hill for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen record debt, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to deliver what matters, such as the upgrade to Orchard Grove Primary School.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for turning their backs on Victorians who dream of having a home near the people they love and the places they work and the ability to move around this great state.

Leave refused.

Government performance

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Carrum for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $69.9 million on the Seaford stabling project, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the travelling Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the federal shadow assistant minister for housing considers NIMBYs, like the opposition leader and the member for Brighton, a poison.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Cranbourne for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen record debt, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to deliver what matters, such as the upgrade to Rangebank Primary School.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that if the opposition were in power there would be no minimum design standard and a generation of Victorians would live in tiny unlivable windowless apartments.

Leave refused.

Proof

Government performance

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Eltham for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $73 million on the Hurstbridge line stage 2 upgrade, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions of dollars on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Croydon for organising the former Shadow Minister for Planning to meet with Liberal donor developers under the guise of sponsorship of an industry forum.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Frankston for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen record debt and is keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to deliver what matters, such as the upgrade to Mount Erin secondary college.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that while the Premier wants to be the person who got millennials into homes, the opposition leader and his party are simply carrying on like a bunch of NIMBY blockers.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Hastings for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen billions in cost blowouts and is keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions of dollars on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Housing

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Greens are in a noalition with the coalition when it comes to building more homes.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Monbulk for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $40 billion on inner-city projects on the Treasurer's credit card but failed to invest in state emergency services for the hills.

Leave refused.

PROOF

Housing

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the Greens are all talk, no action, and it is only the Allan Labor government that will build more homes and more opportunities for Victoria.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Mordialloc for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $219.9 million on the Mordialloc Freeway, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Narre Warren South for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $8.5 million on the Hallam Road upgrade, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victoria's money.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $132.3 million on the Cranbourne–Pakenham line upgrade, failing to deliver the Pakenham hospital, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victoria's money.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the absent member for South Barwon for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen record debt, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to deliver the hundreds of extra homes promised in the Geelong region in the failed Commonwealth Games bid.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Yan Yean for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $31 million on the Yan Yean Road upgrade, keeping Victorians in the dark about billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ripon for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $10.5 million on the V/Line fleet maintenance program and $114.4 million on the Ballarat line upgrades, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:48): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Glen Waverley for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of up to 20 per cent on SRL East, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:48): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ashwood for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $2.1 million on youth justice precincts, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorians' money.

Leave refused.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Greenvale for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $80 million on the Craigieburn Road upgrade, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorian's money.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Eureka for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $114.4 million on the Ballarat line upgrades, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victorian's money.

Leave refused.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:50): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bentleigh for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen record debt, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to deliver what matters, such as completing the upgrade of McKinnon Primary School.

Leave refused.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:50): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bellarine for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $414.1 million dollars on the Barwon women's and children's hospital, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victoria's money.

Leave refused.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:50): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts on the Bendigo–Echuca line upgrade, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victoria's money.

Leave refused.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:51): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Sunbury for failing to stand up to the Premier, who has overseen cost blowouts of $194.9 million on community hospitals like Sunbury community hospital, keeping Victorians in the dark about the billions of dollars on the Treasurer's credit card and failing to manage Victoria's money.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Multicultural events

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:51): I rise today to highlight the many multicultural events I have attended alongside community members from the electorate of Mill Park, bolstered by the Allan Labor government's support. This month I had the honour of meeting His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Premier's reception at Government House. It was wonderful

to attend alongside many members of the Greek community of Mill Park, including the Greek Orthodox Community of Whittlesea, the Cyprus Community of the northern suburbs of Melbourne, Greek Australian Ex-Servicemen's Reserve Whittlesea and Districts Incorporated, Mill Park Greek Elderly Citizens Club and the Greek Cypriot Cultural and Theatrical Centre.

I also attended Premier Jacinta Allan's Diwali celebrations with many members of different community groups from my electorate. These events emphasise the Allan Labor government's commitment to valuing and supporting the multicultural fabric that makes Victoria such a strong, welcoming and inclusive place.

In addition, I had the privilege of participating in two magnificent celebrations of the Hindu faith. The first one was the Vedanta society of Melbourne's beautiful Deepavali celebration. My special thanks to president Naren Prasad, vice-president Shekar Lal, secretary Kamal Deo and treasurer Arun Parsad JP for your generosity. Sarbojanin Puja Utsav of Victoria organised a fabulous day of rituals and celebrations for Durga Puja for Bengali community members. Their creativity was wonderful. My sincere regards to president Bikash Choudhury, vice-president Sanjib Saha, treasurer Prabir Deb and other members of the community.

Auburn South Primary School

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (09:53): I rise solemnly this morning. Yesterday afternoon a vehicle crashed through the fence of Auburn South Primary School and struck several children. We have all been devastated to learn that an 11-year-old boy has died after being hit. Police report that the boy was rushed to hospital with critical injuries but unfortunately he could not be saved. Our thoughts and sympathies are with his family and friends at this incredibly difficult time. Two girls aged 11, one 10-year-old girl and a 10-year-old boy were also taken to hospital with serious injuries.

I know all members will join with me in wishing all of these kids a speedy recovery. Our best wishes as a house I know I can extend to all students, staff and parents of the Auburn South Primary School community. On behalf of our community may I also extend our most sincere and heartfelt thanks to the first responders and emergency services workers who attended the scene. Victorians know you all have a hard job, no more so than when it involves injured children. On behalf of all of us: thank you. To the families of all of those affected: if there is anything we can do, please reach out.

May I conclude by extending on behalf of the house my thoughts and best wishes to principal Marcus Wicher and also Ross Pritchard, who is the principal of Auburn High School, their teachers and staff and the students, parents and families of both schools at this most difficult time.

Auburn South Primary School

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:54): I would just like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his statement there, and I think in unison this house was shocked with the news yesterday. It is not too far away from my patch, and I know when I got home last night I spoke to Bec and said, 'Did you hear?' We did not have to say the rest. I think we are all very sad with the news, and again, if there is anything any of us can do, we will be there for those who are touched by this tragedy.

Ashburton-a-Fair

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:55): On other matters, we have had a number of events in the Ashwood district in recent times, and I thank the Rotary Club of East Malvern and Chadstone for putting on their Ashburton-a-Fair recently. Sam, who is also in grade 5 – and it is a poignant time – and I had a great day going to the Ashburton-a-Fair. I would like to give a shout-out to all of the stallholders who were there on the day. I probably will not get time this morning, but thank you to all of them for being there in our patch. We have had a busy time, and I think I will keep other moments for another day.

Mirboo North Italian Festa

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:56): It is with great disappointment that I report that the fabulous Mirboo North Italian Festa will not be proceeding next year. The festa started out celebrating the feast of St Paul, the patron saint of many of the Italian migrants who settled in and around Mirboo North, but in 2016 a small band of volunteers made it a much bigger event. That first year was a staggering success, and subsequent events have attracted as many as 20,000 people for fun, music and food. However, victims of their own success, the festa committee is now exhausted and unable to manage the huge load of running such a big event. On behalf of the community, a big thanks to Rosie Romano and all the team for their efforts in celebrating the Italian heritage of the region and putting Mirboo North on the map.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:57): It was a pleasure to join colleagues at the annual mountain cattlemen's get-together near Omeo. Celebrating all things high country and cattlemen's tradition and culture, it was a great event, and there remains an enormous amount of goodwill and support for the mountain cattlemen, who truly do care for the high country.

Country Fire Authority Fish Creek brigade

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:57): Happy 80th birthday to the Fish Creek fire brigade. Established in 1944, the Fish Creek brigade is older than the CFA itself. A special mention to Captain Ray Poletti, who was awarded a CFA service medal for an incredible 55 years of volunteering.

Country Fire Authority Winnindoo brigade

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:57): Still on the CFA, what an embarrassment it is for this Labor government that the Winnindoo fire brigade still is not inside of the new station they were promised four years ago this month. Incredibly, the station is now not expected to be built until 2026, six years after it was announced in the state budget. What an indictment this is, proving yet again that Labor cannot manage money, cannot manage projects – *(Time expired)*

Westall Primary School

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (09:58): A huge congratulations to all the term 3 award recipients at Westall Primary School. It was lovely to visit to share in the celebration and to present some of the awards. Westall Primary School is an amazing local school, with its values of excellence, fairness, kindness and creativity. A special congratulations to those receiving awards for demonstrating school values, those being Emily, Reagan-Lee, Keyaan, Cheryl, Mark, Ayaan, Athena, Cyndie, Rosely, Amarise, Rothana, Sourya, Erica, Yogesh, Francheska, Ariel, Rajveer and Vanij. Congratulations. You should all be so proud of yourselves. Keep on living those school values.

Thank you for having me at the award ceremony and letting me join the celebration, and thank you to principal Peter Jeans. The school, as part of the Westall school regeneration project, is looking fantastic. The hub and the learning centre are world-class, and that is what the kids and their hardworking teachers deserve. I am looking forward to visiting the school again.

Glen Iris supermarket development

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:59): I rise to condemn the Minister for Planning for approving the Woolworths development at 173 Burke Road in Glen Iris. This planning minister was very keen to object to overdevelopment in her own Carrum community. She even wrote a letter protesting it, but she could not wait to rubberstamp a huge property play from a big supermarket chain that just coincidentally, I am sure, has donated tens of thousands of dollars to the Australian Labor Party. Labor planning ministers who object to oversized developments in their own backyards but rubberstamp them in other communities should be called out for what they are: hypocrites. This 173 Burke Road proposal was rejected by Stonnington council because it was inappropriate for the site and the

surrounds. Woolworths then appealed, and after a 12-day hearing at VCAT it was rejected by VCAT for the very same reasons.

But Labor's planning minister from Carrum apparently knows better, because she has rubberstamped a massive supermarket and towers proposal within 400 metres of three schools and a medical clinic, which will cause havoc on the roads and sacrifice the livability of local residents and traders. Make no mistake: with 10 local activity development centres being imposed by Labor on my Malvern electorate alone, this is Labor's blueprint of things to come – high-rise, high-density overdevelopment, ignoring the community and doing the bidding of Labor-donating big developers.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, you are not in your place. I ask you to cease interjecting while you are not in your place.

Bellarine electorate emergency services volunteers

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:00): Our volunteer emergency services on the Bellarine work tirelessly all year round to support local community members and visitors to the peninsula. I am immensely proud that our state government is continuing to support these vital organisations through the volunteer emergency services equipment program. Last year this grant scheme provided essential funding for four organisations across the Bellarine, and these funds were used to secure critical operational equipment, vehicles and appliances and make minor facility improvements. Over the past year I have had the privilege of spending time with these organisations, witnessing the incredible work that these volunteers do to ensure that our community can be as safe as possible in the ocean, on our roads and in dangerous weather events. I am deeply grateful for their dedication and hard work.

It was recently announced that the volunteer organisations across the Bellarine will share again in over $15 million from the 2024–25 volunteer emergency services equipment program. Drysdale CFA, Mannerim CFA, Barwon Heads 13th Beach Surf Life Saving Club and Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club are receiving a combined total of $123,000 to go towards new vehicles, rescue equipment and various appliances that will help them continue with their vital work.

Finally I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all those volunteers who devote their time and effort to supporting communities across the Bellarine. Your dedication and willingness to serve when we need it the most is invaluable, and I could not be more grateful for your service. I look forward to meeting with these organisations once again over the coming months and to hear how we can continue as a state government to support their vital work.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (10:02): Labor's 44-tower demolition plan is a social, environmental, health and financial disaster. All year this government has contorted itself trying to justify demolishing homes in a housing crisis. They have just one PR line – the towers have to be demolished and privatised because they just cannot be upgraded – and they parrot this. Whenever they are pressed to give evidence though, not one single document can be produced. But then Labor announced that 13 low-rise buildings on Elizabeth Street in Richmond containing 78 homes would be razed to the ground next. The unexpected addition of these Richmond walk-up buildings proves that for Labor this is not actually about the towers, the building conditions or the best interests of the residents or even about providing any affordable housing. This is about the value of the land. This is Labor's ideological retreat from public housing, and in the process they are willingly handing over prime public land to property developers, who will no doubt fund their next election campaign.

Country Fire Authority Keysborough brigade

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:03): Recently I had the great privilege to join the Keysborough CFA legends for their annual awards night dinner. It has been 80 years of service for the

Keysborough CFA since the Brewer family were so instrumental in donating land and establishing this site some eight decades ago. While the paddocks have changed over time – we have a wonderful, thriving Keysborough community with tens of thousands of residents across Keysborough and Keysborough South and a thriving industrial estate just out on the Keysborough side and to Braeside to the west and then into Dandenong South – and the complexity of their service has changed, the volunteer values and support have not. They are a wonderful group of people who put themselves in harm's way to support our community in terms of need. I want to give a big shout-out to Stewie Matulis, who is their captain and was recognised for 20 years service; Wayne Aumann, who remarkably had 40 years of service; Ian Robinson and Jamie Atkin, who were recognised for 15 years of service; Emmanuel Vella, for 10 years of service; and Shandelle Ross, who is an extraordinary leader, for five years of service, and she also took out the Brewer Award on the evening.

We are really excited about a plan to upgrade Keysborough CFA that is getting traction in our local community. We want to make sure the first-class facilities meet the first-class volunteerism in our community going forward. I want to give a big shout-out to their team and the work that they do on behalf of our community to keep us safe. Going into a heavy fire season, we wish them all the best in serving our community.

Upper Goulburn Community Radio

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:05): Upper Goulburn Community Radio celebrated 30 years on air on community radio on Saturday night. It is not easy to keep a community radio station on air, but they have done an amazing job over this period and have really earned their stripes, particularly for their quality coverage of emergency events, fire, flood and drought. They were the first community station to become an emergency broadcaster. With 45 presenters and volunteer support, their future is rosy. The radio station would not be where it is today without their efforts and dedication. Thank you to committee members Michael Mawson, Naomi Booker, Judy Blakeney, Pam Young, Sara Southam, Daryl Lloyd and Peter Weekes OAM, who is a station stalwart. Peter was inducted into the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia honour roll on the Gold Coast recently. With only four inductees from 49 nominations across Australia, this is a big deal.

Kinglake postal services

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:06): The decision by Australia Post making changes to parcel delivery in Kinglake and surrounds is an appalling attack on small business and small communities. Not only does this change impact the viability of the two local post offices, it also threatens the community fabric. Not only do community members go to the post office to pay bills, do their banking, purchase gifts and other products, but it is also where they go to connect with community members. These businesses are critical to the heart and health of the communities on the Kinglake Ranges. The next closest town is 25 kilometres away with no public transport option. This is an appalling attack on Kinglake.

Northcote electorate multicultural communities

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:06): I rise to celebrate the depth of our diverse communities in Northcote and Victoria. Multiculturalism is our greatest strength, yet this cherished element of our national identity has been under pressure, spurred by heartbreaking overseas conflicts but also, regrettably, by the divisive tactics of bad-faith actors. But I see a more hopeful future, one exemplified by the milestones and celebrations of the last few months in the inner north.

Last Sunday I was honoured to join the Consulate General of India to Melbourne Dr Sushil Kumar for a stunning and inclusive Diwali celebration at the Thornbury Theatre. Nearby the Islamic Museum of Australia marked its 10-year anniversary, an exemplary institution with a mission for cross-cultural dialogue. Around the corner at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite church I dropped in on the youth group learning about stem cell donation for patients with ethnic backgrounds. Meanwhile at Bell Primary the Premier and I got to see Italian learning in action. Greek story time at the library is growing, and a

loved community kinder celebrated its name change from Batman to Balit, honouring First Nations history.

These things may seem small, but they speak to the power of our diversity and our shared commitment to a peaceful democracy. Our deep links to varied homelands mean we will always feel global conflicts acutely, but we can harness that as a strength. On behalf of Northcote's diverse communities, I again voice our urgent call for diplomacy over war and our enduring wish for peace and freedom for all peoples.

Colin McKenna

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:08): South-West Coast mourns the passing of an extraordinary man who shaped our region and enriched countless lives. Colin McKenna, born to humble beginnings on a dairy farm, rose to be a prominent businessman and one of the region's largest employers. His paddock-to-plate beef and dairy business exported across the world, but despite his success Colin never lost sight of his roots, sharing his wealth generously within his community.

His commitment to South-West Coast extended far beyond business. Colin was a great supporter of and donated to the cancer centre in Warrnambool. This centre has brought vital care closer at home for many, a legacy of Colin's vision and compassion. A private philanthropist, Colin frequently gave to those in need without seeking recognition. I recall him calling me asking if someone was in genuine need, and upon my affirmation he quietly stepped in to help, never needing public acknowledgement.

I was fortunate to know Colin after he acquired Union Station in Woolsthorpe. After a year, we purchased our farm nearby. He was not only a skilled businessman but a knowledgeable farmer. All my children gained formative work experience under his guidance, benefitting immensely from his mentorship and dedication to helping young people in our region find their path. Colin had an exceptional gift for remembering names and made everyone he met feel valued. I am grateful for his mentorship and the friendship I shared with him, along with the support of his family.

To Janice, Dean, Sharnie and the entire McKenna family, we extend our deepest sympathies. Colin was one of a kind, and his legacy will continue to inspire. Vale, Colin McKenna.

Naranga School

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:09): Last week I saw that it was full steam ahead at Naranga School in Frankston, with the state government redevelopment going ahead. The builders have even cut little portholes into the boards so that the students can go up and see all the tractors and backhoes doing their jobs. It is an exceptional space, and Shaun Bacon is an exceptional principal.

Berry Street education model

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:10): Speaking of principals, last week I was pleased to host a really informative principals morning tea with special guest Tom Brunzell from Berry Street, who spoke about the Berry Street education model. It was a great time just to thank the principals in the Frankston area for all they do for our children and our youth, and that is in an education space but also in a space where sometimes school is the primary place of foundation for some of these children. So I thank them for all their hard work, and it was a great time to get together and talk about our plans for the future as well and the Education State.

VCE examinations

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:10): As everybody knows, the year 12 exams started yesterday. I have got a year 12 in my household, Hunter, who has been studying very hard. I want just to say to everyone out there, whether your next steps are uni or TAFE or straight into a job, you will always have plenty of opportunities under an Allan Labor government, and our community is so proud of you for your achievements throughout the schooling year as well. Well done, keep going and celebrate at the end of it.

Child protection

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:11): Shocking new details from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing revealed the crisis facing the state's most vulnerable children. Victoria's child protection department has received 66 reports of deaths of children, most of them younger than two years old, who were either inside or known to the system in the past four years. On top of that there have been 5400 reported incidents of abuse over this same period, including physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. Most shockingly, in a single year there have been 160 reports of 85 children living in residential care who have been victims of child prostitution, including some as young as 11. Statistics like these are enough to make any Victorian feel sick to their stomach. What a damning indictment of the Labor government's child protection system, where children in its care are still facing abuse, exploitation and even premature death. Is it any wonder that two-thirds of young people in Victoria and across Australia's youth justice system have had contact with the child protection system within the past 10 years? This includes stories like that of an eight-year-old boy in state care who tried to hold up a supermarket with a butter knife, who had been roaming the streets with teens twice his age, leaving home almost daily to steal and beg for money. If there is one thing that is clear, it is that vulnerable children are being failed under a Labor government in Victoria. The most vulnerable in our state deserve better than this.

North Geelong Secondary College

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:12): Last Friday was the annual multicultural festival at North Geelong Secondary College. This event is a highlight in my calendar each year, as I know it is right across the community, and this year was no exception. North Geelong Secondary College prides itself on being home to a vibrant multicultural community. The day was filled with joy and pride as our community came together to celebrate one another's cultural heritage with music, dancing and food. It was a showcase of the vibrant and thriving community at North Geelong, and it is not hard to see that North Geelong Secondary is enriched by the collective experiences of diverse communities. Congratulations to principal Paul Dawson and all of the staff and student leaders who organised this incredible event, and a special shout-out to all the year 12s involved, and good luck for your exams.

While there I also had the opportunity to stop by their human library project and hear stories from students Abi and Sina about their journey to Australia as refugees. Thank you to Abi and Sina for sharing that with me.

Lara RSL

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:13): On Saturday 19 October I was honoured to attend the Thank You for Your Service Day hosted by the Lara RSL sub-branch. It was a wonderful opportunity to say thank you to our Australian Defence Force veterans and first responders, who give so much to keep Victorians safe. Their dedication and sacrifices do not go unnoticed, and we are grateful for their service and honoured to recognise their invaluable contributions to our community. Thank you to Lara RSL president Marcus McEwen and his team, who hold this annual event.

Yarrawonga community visitor program

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:14): The Yarrawonga community visitor program is concerned about the lack of funding through the Office of the Public Advocate. I spoke in depth with local residents who go around our region meeting up with people with disabilities to ensure they are being cared for. There is a small amount of money for petrol, but at the end of the day this money is getting squeezed tighter and tighter. I congratulate those from the Yarrawonga community visitor program, and I call on the Victorian government to properly fund these people who reach out to people with disabilities.

Game Management Authority

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:14): The Game Management Authority need to have a good hard look at themselves. I am currently assisting one of my local communities where there is a dispute between hound hunters and land managers. I have reached out to local police, who were very supportive and have agreed to meet me in my office to discuss a better way forward. I have received acceptances from five different bodies to discuss and potentially resolve this issue. Sadly, Game Management Authority have said:

> … GMA are unable to attend this meeting due to a policy relating to meetings held with opposition members.

What a pathetic response to someone who is trying to help them do their job. I hope the minister responsible will send a clear message to this group: do your job properly or find a new one. Victorians are sick and tired of this government setting rules and regulations that prevent people doing their job and allow bureaucrats to hide behind these rules. It is starting to look like the people's republic of Victoria.

Wangaratta Festival of Jazz and Blues

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:15): A huge shout-out to volunteers and supporters of this year's Wangaratta jazz festival. It began in 1990, and we thought last year the curtain was going to come down on this great event, alas – but with fresh blood and a reinvigoration we are back on this weekend in 2024.

Glen Waverley electorate schools

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:15): Recently I visited Highvale Primary School, and I would like to thank acting principal Carly Epskamp for hosting and showing me around this wonderful school. It was a pleasure to present new Victorian, Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags to Glen Waverley Primary School at a recent assembly. The example set by their school captains and leaders was there for all to see, and I thank principal Frank Catalano for inviting me.

With great energy, Camelot Rise Primary School put on their school production called *Step Back in Time*. I saw for myself the joy with which they presented decades of evolving music and culture, and I would like to give a shout-out to the future stars that played the main cast, including Mathilde McKellar, Camden Jardine, Helena Huang, Dhanya Kunapuli, Amelia Braybon and Iris Qiu. The show was a nostalgic class act. I would like to acknowledge directors Debra Hong and Cam Stillman, and I would like to thank the rest of the team for such a spellbinding show. I would like to thank principal Matthew Coney for his excellent leadership.

Capping off the season of Glen Waverley district teaching excellence was a visit to Glen Waverley South Primary School accompanied by the Minister for Education and you, Deputy Speaker, member for Ashwood. Together we were greeted by principal Con Vellios and the school captains April and Karanvir and school vice-captains Aleksander and Sophie. We toured the new buildings, including the new classrooms, STEM and food tech spaces, wellbeing and community hub and outdoor breakout spaces, made possible by a $9.4 million investment from the Allan Labor government. We are truly the Education State.

Community safety

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:17): At the start of the last school holidays a young man tragically lost his life at Woodgrove shopping centre, a place where many Melton kids gather to socialise. Knife crime is now threatening to take this safe space away from them. He did not deserve this, and now his family along with the entire Melton community are grieving his loss. Knives are taking the lives of our youth. In the past few years three young people from Melton have lost their lives to knife crime, tearing apart our families and communities.

This culture of knives and carrying them around like some kind of armour is cowardice. We must do better to shift this culture. That responsibility extends beyond these four walls of Parliament; it extends out into our streets, our schools, our homes and across the community. We all have a role to play in addressing knife culture. This government has recognised the responsibility we have to give police more powers to address knife culture out in the community, and this includes stronger search powers. There is no excuse for carrying these deadly weapons.

I commend the work of Victoria Police. This year they have seized more than 10,000 knives, daggers and swords, and they continue to crack down on these businesses that choose to sell weapons to youth for profit. Enough is enough; we must change this knife culture. If you choose to carry a knife, the police will find you, and you will face the consequences. But this is not just about punishment, it is about protecting our future and our young people. I urge the youth in Melton to come forward and speak with me about why they feel the need to carry knives so that we can work together to find ways to end knife culture amongst the young people together.

Victorian Gig Fund

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:18): On 16 September it was rocktastic to drop into the Post Office Hotel on the corner of Sydney Road and Reynard Street in Coburg – with my double-neck 12-string and six-string Ovation guitar, by the way – to announce a $10,000 investment to support local artists, musicians and performers. Secured via the Victorian Labor government's gigs fund, the investment provides the iconic Post Office Hotel with a leg-up to support local jobs and emerging local artists to perform live via paid gigs and will also help encourage more locals to get out and support our live music venues, pubs and clubs while having a beer, wine or meal and enjoying the very best of our creative local scene. It was a pleasure to announce the funding alongside the Post Office Hotel publican Daniel Caneva and local community champion Helen Politis and this initiative to also help support our central Coburg revitalisation efforts.

St Linus Kindergarten

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:19): It was a pleasure to officially open the $93,000 new accessible learning and play space facilities at St Linus kinder in Merlynston on 22 August. I commend St Linus's dedicated educators, staff, parents and volunteers, including Avril Slater, for their efforts in delivering this magnificent project, and I thank local advocate Hassaan Gul for joining the day.

Pascoe Vale electorate schools

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:19): On 21 August it was delightful to visit Pascoe Vale North Primary School to present a $1000 cheque and recycling bag to support the school's various environmental, sustainability and community initiatives. Thanks to principal Deborah Crane and to all of the students, including Angus Kendall, who wrote to me to share the school's good work and to advocate for this funding. On 7 August the member for Broadmeadows and I also dropped into Pascoe Vale Girls College to announce a $940,000 investment towards supporting much-needed maintenance and refurbishment works across the school campus.

Country Fire Authority Narre Warren North brigade

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:20): I had the pleasure of visiting Narre Warren North CFA, led by new captain Robert Appel and his amazing team. During my visit I had the opportunity to celebrate the arrival of a new fire truck nicknamed the Beast. Thanks to the amazing investment by the Allan Labor government's CFA capability funding package of over $460,000, the Beast features a 400-litre water tank, electric monitors and electric winding hose reels. The Allan Labor government is ensuring that emergency services have the equipment they need to keep Victorians safe with the upcoming fire season.

Endeavour Hills Cricket Club

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:20): I was also pleased recently go to the Endeavour Hills Cricket Club season launch and family day. It was a great chance to meet life members and to witness the induction of the great clubman Chris Peake. I was very honoured to also be presented as the number one ticketholder for the upcoming season. The Endeavour Hills Cricket Club plays a really important role with our local community by promoting health, fitness and nurturing extremely great talent.

City of Casey citizenship ceremony

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:21): On Wednesday I had one of my favourite things to do, which was to attend the City of Casey citizenship ceremony with my friend the member for Cranbourne and the member for Narre Warren South. Seeing the excitement on their faces when they take the oath and sing the national anthem is truly one of the most exciting things that I do in this job. It was also such an honour to witness some of my friends get their citizenship. I applaud the contributions these citizens will make to our community. Together we celebrate this milestone, and I look forward to their bright futures.

Royal Geelong Yacht Club

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:21): On Saturday I had the great pleasure of attending the celebrations at the Royal Geelong Yacht Club, which included a tour of the new Victorian sailing school, which enables young people across our state but also people with disabilities to have the opportunity to go sailing with experts.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Inquiry into the Operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:22): I am very happy to stand today to talk about the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report on the inquiry into the Freedom of Information Act 1982, tabled in this place last month. When the original Victorian act was legislated over 40 years ago it was considered to be state of the art and certainly the leading freedom of information act in Australia, and I believe it worked very well for many years. However, it is obvious to all of us in this place that the advances over the last two decades or so in technology, internet, social media and more recently artificial intelligence have completely changed the landscape and nature of how we access information and what access to information we do have. By that I mean we have such great access to information nowadays, more so than ever before, yet getting that information through the current Freedom of Information Act is incredibly difficult, frustrating, expensive and often unsuccessful. So it was no surprise during the course of the committee's hearings into the Freedom of Information Act that we heard loud and clear from almost everybody that spoke at the inquiry that the act was no longer fit for purpose, was broken and way beyond repair.

The current act requires people who want access to information to pull it out of the system. This can be really problematic if you are not quite sure exactly what information you are seeking. It is a bit like trying to find a needle in a haystack, and it maintains the onus on the person seeking the information to ask the right questions, not those that hold it. Considering there were more than 48,000 FOI requests in Victoria last year and the fact that two-thirds of those requests, over 32,000, are asking for information about themselves, it was very clearly stated by all of those that presented at the inquiry that we needed an easier, more efficient and cost-effective way for people to access their own information. The new system that this report supports is a pushed system, meaning that information is pushed out into the public realm and is easily and readily accessible to those who wish to seek it. The report does acknowledge that some information may not be able to be pushed out so freely, so there will be four levels of release: a mandatory proactive release, an additional proactive release, an

informal release and a formal release. Overarching this, it is recommended that a new three-part test is to apply to almost all exemptions to disclosure of information underpinned by a presumption of favouring disclosure of information. This is one of the things I like best that has come out of this inquiry, and that is that the new act will be underpinned by a presumption of favouring disclosure of information. To me that is the key starting point for the new act. Additional to that, I am very excited by the idea of changing the name of this act from 'freedom of information' – although I note some people in the inquiry called it 'freedom from information' because they found it so frustrating to actually get information, oftentimes their own information – to 'right to information'.

The fact is we all have a right to our own information. I am very encouraged that the third-generation push model will be underpinned by the presumption of disclosure, because people have the right to information. With these two points underpinning the starting point to writing the third-generation push model, I am very confident we will get an effective and valuable new right to information act that not only takes into account where we stand today with technology but will also be an act that takes into account the constant and evolving changes to technology, such as artificial intelligence, over the coming decade.

I would like to thank the 65 organisations that came to the inquiry and gave evidence. They all certainly put a lot of effort into their submissions, and it was greatly appreciated. I thank the many organisations and individuals who wrote submissions to the inquiry. I would also like to thank the other members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee for the work they did on this inquiry. I especially would like to thank the secretariat for the amazing and very in-depth work they all did on this report – quite simply, they were amazing. There are 101 recommendations in this report. I hope they are all accepted. I look forward to a new right to information act. I commend this report to the house.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:26): Today I am speaking about the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report *Vaping and Tobacco Controls* that was tabled in August 2024. This report notes that the crimes associated with illicit tobacco and vape trade included – and if I can refer you to chapter 4, page 44 – extortion, firearm-related violence, recruitment of vulnerable and youth offenders, arson attacks and firebombing. Recommendations from this report, which you will find in section 5.3.2, include the establishment of a licensing scheme, improving regulatory insight, enhancing powers of investigation and enforcement and increased deterrence via stronger penalties. It was just yesterday that these recommendations would have been achieved by the coalition's private members bill. A finding from the report, specifically finding 21, says the absence of a licensing scheme and weak penalties have directly contributed to an extensive black market in illicit vapes and cigarettes in Victoria, attracting overseas crime syndicates. Finding 23 says the Department of Health is not currently taking enforcement action against the sale of illicit vapes and tobacco for reasons including deficiencies in the current legislation and lack of resources. Finding 26 says that the criminal activity associated with illicit vaping and tobacco is affecting small and medium business owners through increased risk and incidence of violence and additional costs of responding to such violence.

This is a real issue in my community – the issue of vaping and illegal tobacco stores. There have been a number of alleged illegal tobacco stores that have opened in my electorate, including one just next door to a local primary school. I have received so much communication in emails, text messages and phone calls about this issue from small business owners, parents and school communities who are so worried about this scourge of violence that is impacting our community, not just in the electorate of Warrandyte but across the state of Victoria.

It was just yesterday that the Allan Labor government rejected the proposed tobacco licensing scheme that we put to Parliament under this private members bill under which fines of up to $1 million could be imposed for breaches. It was earlier this year, in May, that Premier Allan declared that she and the government, her government, would take action, but here we are nearly in November still waiting for

action in the middle of this alarming crime wave, with only just three days ago the latest firebombing attack in Mickleham. We on this side of the house were fed up with all of the talk and no action, so we put forward a very logical and very necessary private members bill aimed at ending Victoria's illicit tobacco trade and the organised crime warfare in this illegal sector, which is linked to more than 100 arson attacks in Victoria.

Our proposal was straightforward, simple and sought to protect Victorians from the scourge of illegal activity in our state. As the Allan Labor government remains inactive in this space we, the coalition, proposed the introduction of a licensing scheme for the sale of tobacco projects where (1) anyone wanting to sell tobacco would first need to pass a fit and proper person test similar to when applying for a liquor license, (2) all wholesale and retail tobacco stores would need a license to operate, (3) Victoria Police would receive beefed up powers to raid businesses and seize illegal products, creating search and seizure laws for Victoria Police relating to these tobacco products and (4) criminals caught selling illicit tobacco would be fined up to 5000 penalty points, which is equivalent to almost $1 million, while repeat offenders could receive up to two years behind bars.

Stakeholders like the CEO of Ritchies Australia Fred Harrison are on record saying that Victoria is the only state in Australia without a tobacco licensing regime. Here is what he had to say:

> It's disappointing that Labor thinks this is a stunt when good people and honest retailers are being harmed by their lack of action …
>
> Victoria had over 115 firebombings and has seen every other eastern seaboard state take this issue seriously and introduce proper legislation against the black market.

What a wasted opportunity. Here we had a bipartisan opportunity to put an end to the chaos, violence and criminality, but no, the Allan Labor government decided to play politics rather than support the coalition's private members bill that was going to finally protect Victorians. The Labor government might be happy to treat the Victorian public with contempt – but not on this side of the house. We listened to our community and took significant step to try and manage this crisis.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (10:32): I rise to make a few brief remarks on the Electoral Matters Committee report on the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election. I particularly want to focus on pre-poll, and I think back to what pre-poll started as. I remember the first time I ever heard of pre-poll was 20 years ago, during the 2004 federal election, in the electorate of Hotham, which was held by Simon Crean. I got a call from the member for Oakleigh, who at the time was Simon Crean's campaign manager, and he said, 'Can you staff the pre-poll booth tomorrow?' My response was 'What's pre-poll?' Anyway, he gave me the address and said, 'Be there at 9 am. Bring your own deckchair.' I turned up at this church hall in Cheltenham. I was there from 9 am to 5 pm with a lovely lady from the Liberal Party, who I still bump into from time to time. We spoke for the entire day, and I reckon we saw 20 voters over the entire day – and certainly not a candidate. That is what pre-poll was back then. It has since evolved into something very, very different.

While I think we need to make voting as accessible as possible, because we have seen the sort of voter suppression in the United States which is very alarming, I also think that it is time to think about how we could possibly make pre-poll work a bit better. I am of the view that 12 days of in-person voting is just too much. I think it is unnecessary. We can make the postal voting system work better. We conduct the local government elections entirely by post, and in my view that has worked pretty well and has made local government elections very accessible. But I think the fact that on day one of pre-poll at the 2022 election, when we turned up that morning and – at least in Bentleigh's case – there were no ballot papers yet, so we could not actually start pre-poll, it just goes to show that we are probably starting the early voting period a bit too early. So I actually support the recommendation in this report to shorten the pre-poll voting period to a period of seven days.

The other thing that I wish to touch on is poor behaviour at the pre-poll centres. I am really, really pleased to see some recommendations in the report about addressing poor behaviour. In my case it was poor behaviour by supporters of far-right candidates, but in other parts of Melbourne it was poor behaviour by supporters of far-left candidates as well.

There are both extremities, and I have heard from members about both extremities. In my case at the pre-poll centre in East Bentleigh there was a man on one occasion wearing a T-shirt advertising a far-right independent candidate from a neighbouring seat, who just spent 2 hours not even handing out any how-to-vote cards, just hurling abuse at me and my supporters. He was not moved on by Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) staff. That is not on, regardless of which candidate or which volunteers it is directed at. I am glad that there is a heavy emphasis in this report on how we might address that behaviour.

The only other thing that I would mention is the locations of the pre-poll centres. My electorate has eight suburbs, and both pre-poll centres were in the one suburb. My electorate starts at North Road, Ormond, and it ends in the south at Centre Dandenong Road, Cheltenham, yet both of the pre-poll centres were in East Bentleigh, which is in the north of my electorate. I think that just speaks to the haste with which the VEC has to get these things together and make arrangements for elections, but I would like to see a little bit more effort go into ensuring that pre-poll centres are located in the best possible way to make them as accessible as possible for our local communities. I commend the committee on this report, particularly the chair, the member for Kororoit.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:36): The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report tabled in March 2024 in regard to the 2021–22 and 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes provides a great insight and a status update of what is happening in Victoria's mental health system. There are a number of elements which feed into this. We have got the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which handed down its interim report in November 2019 and its final report in February 2021. That timing overlaps with the reporting period of PAEC, and we can see what some of the impacts have been of the recommendations of the royal commission but most importantly how those recommendations have been implemented or not.

There are two main aspects in relation to the royal commission recommendations, which are covered off in different departments within this report. The first is around the mental health levy, which of course is managed by Treasury, whole of government, and the second element is around the health department. It is around the actual outcomes and what the impact is for people seeking mental health support within the community and, when they cannot get that support in the community, in our hospitals. Unfortunately we have not got a great amount of transparency over where the mental health levy is going. We see, and PAEC reported on this, that the amount of revenue from businesses contributing to the mental health levy is increasing. Over the latest reporting period it was about $900 million. We see that raised over this current budget period to about $1 billion for mental health this current year. But we do not know where that money is being spent.

We now have a situation where 44 of the 65 recommendations in the final report of the royal commission are overdue at this point in time. By the end of this year a further four recommendations will be added to that list of being overdue, so 48 of 65 recommendations will be overdue. This is despite billions of dollars being spent; we are not seeing an impact on the mental health outcomes. This is having a catastrophic impact on communities. We all know that when mental health is managed in a positive way, when people can access first-line support in their community, they can manage their mental health more ably. They are able to retain their job, retain their family and friend connections and networks and they are able to participate in the community in a more positive way. If they cannot access those primary supports, then it has a flow-on effect. People call an ambulance more often.

People will go to an emergency department more often. It will have a greater impact on inpatient admissions and treatment in a psych bed in a hospital. This is exactly what we are seeing in Victoria.

I refer to finding 31:

> The Department of Health has not met its target for the performance measure 'Percentage of departures from emergency departments to a mental health bed … within 8 hours' over a 13-year period, recording a low of 39.5% in 2022–23.

That is the worst on record despite one of the only initiatives being more acute mental health beds being implemented by the Labor government.

We have also got finding 32:

> The undersupply of mental health beds in Victoria and demand for inpatient bed-based services outstripping supply were two key reasons why the Department of Health did not meet its target for percentage of departures from emergency departments to a mental health bed within eight hours by large margins in 2021–22 and 2022–23.

We see this replicated throughout PAEC's report of March of this year. My greatest concern is we are seeing the delay now of so many recommendations put forward by the royal commission. Recommendations about building Victoria's mental health workforce are on hold, as are recommendations about rolling out mental health locals right across the state, but particularly in my electorate of Lowan, where there is extremely limited access to mental health support. We were promised locals in Horsham and in Hamilton – we are not getting those in the foreseeable future.

We need to get a financial plan for Victoria, and that is what the Liberals and Nationals have announced today. It is ensuring that Victorian taxpayers have comfort in knowing if they are spending money, if they are paying taxes, their money will be spent in the ways that the government promises, in a transparent way. We will deliver honest and transparent budgets, we will track taxpayer money and payments in real time, and we will also plan for Victoria's future.

Environment and Planning Committee

Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:41): I am very pleased to provide a report from the Environment and Planning Committee on our inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works, following the government response to our inquiry being provided just last sitting week.

I am very privileged to chair the Environment and Planning Committee and have the opportunity to work cooperatively with members from both sides of the chamber, especially the deputy chair, the member for Morwell, who has been an outstanding committee member. I would also like to thank the members for Bass, Croydon, Monbulk, Nepean, Ripon and Warrandyte, who are also great to work with, for their positive and collaborative approach.

In Australia subcontractors complete 80 per cent of our national construction. Significantly, this is the highest in the world. The construction industry in Victoria has been found to have higher levels of insolvency than other sectors, and these insolvencies can lead to non-payment and financial hardship for subcontractors, workers and consumers, as well as having an adverse effect on the economy.

A key focus of our committee's work was payment practices in the construction industry. We received 44 submissions from 73 stakeholders, as well as hearing from 10 witnesses across two days of public hearings. Our recommendations proposed reforms to address problems of systematic poor payment practices and issues of financial risk in Victoria's construction industry when it comes to the non-payment of subcontractors.

Our inquiry made 28 extensive recommendations to the Victorian government, including legislative reform to modernise the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002. I note that

the last time that that was amended was 2006, so the industry has changed significantly in those last 18 years, and an update and modernisation is most necessary. Many of our recommendations made proposals to repeal provisions added to the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 in 2006, which will bring it into alignment with other state and territory jurisdictions across Australia, many of whom who have already attacked this very insidious problem.

I welcome the Victorian government's response to our inquiry, which was tabled last sitting week, which acknowledged the impact of poor payment practices and contracting practices on construction in our state. The Victorian government recognises the importance of a strong and stable construction industry and that subcontractors are an integral part of the industry. The government's response broadly supports the need for reform, and of the 28 recommendations, 16 recommendations have been accepted in full and 12 recommendations in principle and part. As a community we should be very, very proud of that. This will come as welcome news for subcontractors across Victoria, particularly those who know firsthand the thin margins, the poor payment practices, the financial insecurity, the power imbalances and high levels of insolvencies that are hallmarks of Victoria's hierarchical construction industries.

Recommendations 2 to 14 from chapter 2 of our report propose changes to the payment practices to strengthen the statutory right to claim payment. I am really pleased that the Victorian government supports in full recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 and supports recommendations 10, 12, 13 and 14 in principle. Further, in terms of improving the adjudication of payment disputes, which was addressed in chapter 5 of our report, the government supports in full recommendations 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24 and 26; supports recommendations 18, 21, 22, 23 in principle; and supports recommendation 25 in part. Finally, recommendations 27 and 28, made in chapter 6 of the report, pertaining to insolvency and the construction industry, both are supported in principle.

As a result of our inquiry into employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works, important reforms will be introduced to provide greater support and protections for Victorian subcontractors, including a new provision to enable contractors to claim a progress payment calculated in accordance with the contract or, if the contract does not provide for the matter, calculated on the basis of the value of the construction work to be carried out.

In closing, I am incredibly proud of the work that was completed by the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee, and I know that contractors will get back to doing what they do best – constructing for Victoria.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:46): I rise to make some comments on the budget estimates report 2023–23. One of the key jobs of any government is managing money, and we know that that it is a real problem for the Allan Labor government. As we have said many, many times, Labor cannot manage money, and every Victorian is paying the price. It is reminiscent of a movie that is quite famous, one that I rather like, *Jerry Maguire*. I am remembering that scene with Tom Cruise, who had a whole stable of footballers that he looked after and had a really successful business, but unfortunately overnight that was run into the ground and he only had one footballer that he managed. That footballer just kept saying to Jerry Maguire, 'Show me the money. Show me the money.' Unfortunately there is not much money left in Victoria, because this government have squandered it all, and what is even worse is they are very, very secretive when it comes to where the money is. That is why the announcement today by John Pesutto and the team is to ensure we get budget transparency so that we actually know where the money is and what money is left. In this particular report it talks about debt, and I know many of the members on the other side are actually a bit unfamiliar about that when it comes to debt and spending. We all probably have our credit cards about due to pay. Well, the credit card debt is through the roof in terms of what the Allan Labor government has left Victoria. In these findings the committee talks about debt and it talks about ballooning debt. In fact by 2027–28 there

will be $188 billion worth of debt which needs to be paid down, and that is why having transparency, having budget honesty and having a plan for Victoria's future and also tracking money in terms of what is being spent is so important.

The budget estimates go through tracking money but unfortunately not very well. That is why the kind of reform that we are proposing, as part of our announcement today from a Liberal–National government, would be about ensuring that the kinds of things that we see in these budgets would be transparent in terms of having a tracker to be able to see the money – the kinds of things in these findings that talk about all of the major projects that have blown out by $40 billion. At the moment within the budget, within the framework of the budget, we have something called contingency, which is just pretty much meant to be there as contingency for emergencies. But at the moment it is a $76 billion black hole – money that is just available there in case you need it. But we do not know what that money is going to be spent on. We know the Suburban Rail Loop had $34.5 billion budgeted. We know that is going be at least $40 billion. That has not been accounted for in this particular budget or the estimates. There is a blowout of 20-plus per cent.

How is that going to be paid? Through the contingency, through the magic pudding?

This particular report talks about federal support of major projects – Commonwealth-supported projects. Again, the Suburban Rail Loop has had the federal government walk away and take $11.5 billion off the table. The project is not funded, yet the government want to proceed. That is why we have real problems with the credit rating agencies like Standard & Poor's, S & P, which are watching what we are doing, because we need to ensure – and the Treasurer is at the table now – that these projects are managed properly. We need to make sure they are managed properly because the contingency fund of $76 billion, that magic pudding – we want to know where that is going to be spent. Victorian taxpayers need to know what money is going to be spent and not what money is going to be wasted.

Forty billion dollars of blowouts, no idea in terms of where the detail is – we are seeing debt at record level with no ability to pay that down, and that is why we are talking today about a debt cap, because we have got to wrestle down the debt. Why? Because Victorians pay; because when you have debt, you have an interest bill. That interest bill then has to be paid. Who pays the interest bill? We all pay the interest bill. It is not something where just the Treasurer and the Premier sit there and say, 'No worries; it's our money.' And that has been the problem with the Allan Labor government – they think it is their own money. They forget it is taxpayers money. The blowout, the waste and the mismanagement are all typical of a Labor government that cannot manage money, and Victorians pay the price, and unfortunately we are seeing it on everything – hospitals, schools, roads, infrastructure. Everything is blown out. Housing is blown out because this government is financially corrupt and bankrupt.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:52): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notices of motion today and ask that they remain on the notice paper.

Bills

State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (10:53): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024:

In my opinion, the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

Overview

This Bill makes a number of amendments to the *Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Act 2024*, the *Duties Act 2000* (**Duties Act**), the *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000* (**FHOGHBS Act**), the *Land Tax Act 2005* (**Land Tax Act**), the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (**Payroll Tax Act**), the *Sale of Land Act 1962*, the *State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2023*, *State Taxation Amendment Act 2024*, the *Taxation Administration Act 1997*, the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (**Valuation Act**) and the *Unclaimed Money Act 2008*. Consequential amendments are also made to the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012*, the *Local Government Act 1989* and the *Windfall Gains Tax Act 2021*.

Many provisions of the Bill do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons. Further, many technical amendments made by the Bill, including amendments to the Valuation Act relating to objections, do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter as they do no more than clarify the intended operation of provisions already enacted.

Human rights issues

The rights under the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to property, the right to privacy and the right to recognition and equality before the law.

Right to property: section 20

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law that authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

Payroll Tax Act: Period for reassessment in the case of underpaid wages

Clause 45 of the Bill amends the Payroll Tax Act to permit the Commissioner of State Revenue (**Commissioner**) to make a reassessment of payroll tax more than five years after the date of the original assessment where a tax default has occurred due to wage theft. This may engage the right to property to the extent that natural person employers who have engaged in wage theft may be liable to pay reassessments of payroll tax in respect of periods which currently cannot be reassessed.

The imposition of payroll tax is not arbitrary because it is precisely formulated in the Payroll Tax Act. It is a self-assessing tax. The legislation is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Extending the Commissioner's power to issue reassessments beyond the current five-year period in instances of wage theft permits the Commissioner to compel payment of amounts of tax for which the person was already liable under the Payroll Tax Act. Furthermore, natural persons who are issued with a reassessment in those circumstances will have the protections provided by the TA Act including rights of objection, review, appeal and refund of overpaid tax.

Duties Act and Land Tax Act: foreign purchaser additional duty and land tax absentee owner surcharge

Clause 32 amends the Duties Act to ensure that certain foreign persons' liability to the foreign purchaser additional duty (**FPAD**) which arose and/or was assessed during the period 1 January 2018 to 8 April 2024 is imposed as it was intended to be imposed.

Clause 42 similarly amends the Land Tax Act to ensure that certain foreign persons' liability to the land tax absentee owner surcharge (**AOS**) which arose and/or was assessed during the period 1 January 2018 to 8 April 2024 is imposed as it was intended to be imposed.

These clauses are intended to address a risk that the existing provisions of the Duties *Act* and the *Land Tax Act* which imposed FPAD or charged AOS were invalid by reason of an inconsistency with the *International Tax Agreements Act 1953* (Cth), which gives the force of law to certain non- discrimination clauses in international tax treaties.

To address that issue, in April this year the Commonwealth amended the *International Tax Agreements Act 1953* (Cth) by the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Foreign Investment) Act 2024* (Cth). The Commonwealth amendments clarify the uncertainty about the interaction of State laws with the international tax agreements, by ensuring that State laws imposing certain taxes (including the AOS and FPAD) prevail in the event of any inconsistency with the international tax agreements. The Commonwealth amendments apply to taxes payable on or after 1 January 2018 or in relation to tax periods ending on or after 1 January 2018. The amendments proposed in the Bill are intended to align with the Commonwealth amendments and ensure that the Victorian taxes are imposed as they were intended to be imposed.

Where clauses 32 and 42 apply, they will operate to impose a new duty or land tax upon the same persons and events, at the same time and in the same amount, as if FPAD or AOS had been validly charged. The practical effect is that if a person had already paid FPAD or AOS and the imposition of those taxes is found to be invalid, their payment will satisfy their liability under the new provisions. If a person owed but had not paid FPAD or AOS, they will be obliged to pay the same amount under the new land tax or duty.

These clauses may engage the right to property to the extent that they require certain foreign natural persons to pay the new duty or land tax, in circumstances where they may arguably have had a claim in respect of any past payments of duty or land tax that had not been validly charged by reason of the inconsistency.

To the extent that natural persons' property rights are affected by the above amendments to the Duties Act and the Land Tax Act, they are in accordance with law and so the right in section 20 is not limited. Even if the right were limited, any limit can be reasonably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter because it is clearly articulated, sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly, and not arbitrary. The duty and land tax is imposed in terms that ensure that the rights and liabilities of all persons will be the same as if the past imposition of these taxes had been validly charged. The provisions confirm that land tax and duty is payable in accordance with what the State had always intended, and ensures citizens of all foreign countries are placed in the same position under Victorian law.

There are no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose of enabling the proper administration of the FPAD and AOS.

Right to privacy: section 13

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their private life, free from interference. This right applies to the collection of personal information by public authorities. An unlawful or arbitrary interference to a natural person's privacy will limit this right.

Land Tax Act: Exemption for housing provided for the relief of poverty

Clause 40 of the Bill introduces section 78D into the Land Tax Act which provides that in order to obtain a land tax exemption in relation to housing provided for the relief of poverty, the owner of the land must apply to the Commissioner for the exemption and provide the Commissioner with any information the Commissioner requests for the purpose of enabling the Commissioner to determine whether the land is exempt.

To the extent that the collection of any personal information from a natural person in relation to these land tax exemption applications may result in interference with a natural person's privacy, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary as these provisions do not require that a person's personal information be published. Further, these provisions only require the provision of information necessary to achieve the purpose of determining eligibility for the land tax exemption which is exclusively in the taxpayer's possession. Therefore, there are no other reasonable means available to achieve this purpose.

Right to recognition and equality before the law: section 8

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination. Discrimination, under section 6 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, includes discrimination on the basis of a person's nationality.

Duties Act and Land Tax Act: foreign purchaser additional duty and land tax absentee owner surcharge

Liability to pay FPAD differentiates based on whether a person is a foreign natural person, which is a person other than an Australian citizen or a permanent resident of Australia (which includes a New Zealand citizen).

Liability to pay AOS differentiates based on whether a person is an absentee owner, which is a person other than an Australian citizen or a permanent resident of Australia (which includes a New Zealand citizen), who

does not ordinarily reside in Australia and is either absent from Australia on 31 December immediately preceding the tax year or is absent from Australia for more than six months in the year prior to the year of assessment, for which land tax relates.

As discussed above, where clauses 32 and 42 of the Bill apply, they will operate to impose a new duty or land tax upon the same persons and events, at the same time and in the same amount, as if FPAD or AOS had been validly charged. The practical effect is that if a person had already paid FPAD or AOS and the imposition of those taxes is found to be invalid, their payment will satisfy their liability under the new provisions. If a person owed but had not paid FPAD or AOS, they will be obliged to pay the same amount under the new land tax or duty. The Charter implications of the original absentee owner surcharge provisions were addressed in the Statement of Compatibility accompanying the State Taxation and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015. Given that FPAD and AOS differentiate between taxpayers' liability on the basis of a person's citizenship, clauses 32 and 42 of this Bill may limit a natural person's right to equal protection of the law without discrimination.

However, any limitation on those rights would be reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter because the amendments are required for the proper administration of the charges, and consequently necessary to achieve the underlying purpose of collecting surcharge rates of land tax from absentee owners of land, which is to improve housing affordability for Victorians and to fund vital infrastructure by increasing the cost of holding land for foreign persons in the Victorian residential housing market. Differential treatment of foreign natural persons is necessary to achieve this purpose. The Bill ensures that this purpose can be achieved by enabling the proper administration of the FPAD and AOS, and further ensures citizens of all foreign countries are placed in the same position under Victorian law, limiting the extent of any discrimination between citizens of different foreign countries. There are no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve these purposes.

Conclusion

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in sections 8, 13 and 20 of the Charter.

TIM PALLAS MP
Treasurer

Second reading

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (10:53): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

The State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024 amends the *Duties Act 2000* (Duties Act), *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000*, *Land Tax Act 2005* (Land Tax Act), *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (Payroll Tax Act), *Sale of Land Act 1962*, *State Taxation and Other Acts Amendment Act 2023*, *State Taxation Amendment Act 2024*, *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (TAA), *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (Valuation of Land Act) and *Unclaimed Money Act 2008*.

This Bill enacts measures to improve the operation of Victoria's taxation laws and the land valuation process. In line with government policy, these amendments maintain a strong and sustainable taxation system. Amendments in this Bill to the Valuation of Land Act will also improve the integrity and effectiveness of the valuation system, ensuring it operates as intended. This Bill further amends the *Unclaimed Money Act 2008* to make a statute law revision.

Bulk billing general practitioners

This Bill introduces a payroll tax exemption from 1 July 2025 for bulk-billing general practice (GP) medical businesses. Following extensive consultation with the primary care sector and work to align settings across the country, in May 2024 the Government announced payroll tax relief for Victorian GP businesses for outstanding or future assessments to contractor GPs up to 30 June 2024. This relief was provided through my *ex gratia* powers as Treasurer. Also announced was a further 12 months of payroll tax relief on contractor GP payments through to 30 June 2025 for any businesses that had not already received advice and begun paying payroll tax for their contractor GPs. The new exemption in this Bill covers employers paying wages to contractor or employee GPs providing bulk-billed consultations. The exemption is a partial exemption, based on the proportion of total payments paid by patients or the relevant funding provider for medical services provided by GPs that are payments for bulk-billed or fully funded medical services. Fully funded medical services include payments in relation to veterans' entitlements, payments from the Transport Accident Commission or workers compensation schemes. This will ease pressures on GPs and give certainty to primary

care businesses and the broader sector, supporting GPs and the important work they do looking after Victorians.

Commercial and industrial property tax subsequent transactions

This Bill extends the duty exemptions for certain subsequent transactions of land in the commercial and industrial property tax reform scheme (CIPT scheme), which commenced on 1 July 2024. Under the CIPT scheme, duty is gradually being abolished on commercial and industrial land and replaced with an annual commercial and industrial property tax. Once land enters the CIPT scheme – generally through a dutiable transaction or relevant acquisition affecting a 50% or more interest in the land – subsequent transfers and acquisitions of the land are exempt from duty. However, subsequent transactions in relation to dutiable leases, fixtures, economic entitlements or dutiable goods are currently not exempt. This Bill exempts transactions of dutiable leases, fixtures or economic entitlements related to land in the CIPT scheme, where appropriate duty was previously paid on or after the land entered the scheme, and also exempts the transfer of dutiable goods transacted as part of an arrangement. A full exemption applies if duty was previously paid on the whole land. If full duty has not been paid, the Commissioner of State Revenue (Commissioner) will have discretion to fully or partially exempt a subsequent transaction based on several legislative factors. This amendment upholds the Government's commitment during passage of the CIPT Act to work with industry stakeholders to introduce an exemption for these transactions. The amendment takes effect from the day after Royal Assent.

Land tax charitable housing exemption

This Bill amends the Land Tax Act to exempt housing owned or managed by a charitable institution and provided to occupants in connection with the charitable purpose of relief of poverty, from the 2025 land tax year. The *State Taxation Amendment Act 2024* previously introduced standalone exemptions for social housing or emergency housing. The exemption introduced in this Bill will assist charitable housing providers that would not meet the eligibility criteria for the new social housing exemption, including where the provider manages housing that is not allocated to residents registered with the Victorian Housing Register but is nonetheless provided for a charitable purpose. The new exemption will also extend to vacant land owned by charitable institutions and declared by its owner to be held for such future use and occupation.

Foreign purchaser additional duty and absentee owner surcharge

This Bill amends the Duties Act and Land Tax Act to ensure that the liability of foreign purchasers and absentee owners of land from certain countries to pay foreign purchaser additional duty (FPAD) and absentee owner surcharge (AOS) for the period 1 January 2018 to 8 April 2024 are imposed as they were intended to be imposed. The TAA is also amended to provide that certain FPAD and AOS assessments made under that Act are taken to have the same force and effect as if made in respect of the new taxes. These amendments are intended to address a risk that the existing provisions of the Duties Act and the Land Tax Act which imposed FPAD or charged AOS were invalid by reason of an inconsistency with the *International Tax Agreements Act 1953* (Cth), which gives the force of law to certain non- discrimination clauses in international tax treaties. On 8 April 2024, Commonwealth amendments in the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Foreign Investment) Act 2024* (Cth) took effect to clarify an uncertainty about the interaction of State laws with the international tax agreements, by ensuring that State laws imposing certain taxes (including the AOS and FPAD) prevail in the event of any inconsistency with the international tax agreements. The Commonwealth amendments apply to taxes payable on or after 1 January 2018 or in relation to tax periods ending on or after 1 January 2018. The amendments proposed in the Bill are intended to align with the Commonwealth amendments and ensure that the Victorian taxes are imposed as they were intended to be imposed. Where the amendments apply, they will operate to impose a new duty or land tax upon the same person and events, at the same time and in the same amount, as if FPAD or AOS had been validly charged. The practical effect is that if a person had already paid FPAD or AOS and the imposition of those taxes is found to be invalid, their payment will satisfy their liability under the new provisions. If a person owed but had not paid FPAD or AOS, they will be obliged to pay the same amount under the new land tax or duty. The amendments confirm that land tax and duty is payable in accordance with what had always been intended, ensure citizens of all foreign countries are placed in the same position under Victorian law and protect the significant State revenue collected from FPAD and AOS taxpayers.

Grants, concessions and exemptions for pensioners and first home buyers

This Bill amends the Duties Act to enable the pensioner and concession card duty reduction to apply to the purchase of a home by the guardian of a person with a legal disability who is an eligible concession cardholder, or to the purchase of a home by the trustee for a special disability trust where the principal beneficiary is an eligible cardholder. The Bill makes equivalent amendments to the first home buyer duty concession and exemption in similar circumstances, where the purchaser is a trustee of a special disability trust and the principal beneficiary is an eligible first home buyer. These amendments will support guardians and trustees (including trustees for special disability trusts) in purchasing housing for a person with a legal disability, or

the principal beneficiary in the case of an special disability trust, where the person meets eligibility criteria for a duty concession or exemption but cannot access them due to the purchase being made under a guardianship or trust arrangement. Consistent with these amendments, the *First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000* will also be amended to allow the trustee for an special disability trust to apply for the First Home Owner Grant on behalf of the principal beneficiary of the special disability trust who is a first home buyer. The amendments take effect from the day after Royal Assent.

Vacant residential land tax – holiday home exemption

This Bill amends the holiday home exemption from vacant residential land tax (VRLT) as it applies to company or trustee owners from 1 January 2025, such that a relevant natural person with an Australian principal place of residence (PPR) may 'directly or indirectly' hold at least 50% of the shares or beneficial interests in the company or trustee owner to qualify for the exemption. Currently the exemption only applies if interests are held directly by a person or persons with an Australian PPR. This Bill also extends the exemption so it can continue after the death of the landowner or the sole shareholder of a company owner, provided a relative of the deceased satisfies relevant requirements for the exemption. This ensures a deceased person's family can continue to benefit from the exemption while the administration of the estate is being processed, on the basis that the land is used as a holiday home. Finally, a change of trustee will be permitted without losing eligibility for an exemption due to the existing requirement that the same trustee must have continuously owned the holiday home since 28 November 2023. This recognises that changes of trustee may occur for legitimate reasons such as the retirement of the former trustee. The amendments commence from the 2025 land tax year.

Vacant residential land tax – other amendments

This Bill contains several further amendments to the *State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2023* and *State Taxation Amendment Act 2024* (2023 and 2024 Acts) regarding the operation of VRLT. Firstly, the Bill clarifies that a 1% concessionary VRLT rate applies to newly developed residential land from 1 January 2025 if the land was previously exempt from 'vacant residential land tax', rather than the existing wording of 'land tax'. From 1 January 2025 the VRLT rate is progressive, where it applies at 1% of capital improved value (CIV) for the first year of VRLT liability, 2% for the second consecutive year and 3% for the third and subsequent years. Newly developed residential land will be eligible for a VRLT exemption for up to 3 tax years after which a 1% concessionary rate will apply each subsequent tax year until the land changes ownership or is no longer subject to VRLT. Secondly, the Bill clarifies that land that has been unimproved residential land for the 5 years preceding 2026 (that is, from 2021) will be liable for VRLT from 1 January 2026. This removes any ambiguity in the existing wording relating to whether the 5-year timeframe covers the period before the commencement of VRLT amendments in the *State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2023*. Thirdly, the VRLT exemption from 1 January 2026 for unimproved residential land contiguous to an owner's PPR will be extended to include the PPR of a qualifying person with a disability and the PPR of a tenant or permitted occupant of the owner. Lastly, the Bill also ensures that land located in Victoria's alpine resort areas will be excluded from the imposition of VRLT, commencing from 1 January 2025. Due to the cyclical and seasonal demand for accommodation in alpine resort areas, lands located in these areas are likely to be considered vacant for VRLT purposes. However, the imposition of VRLT on lands located in Alpine resort areas would be inconsistent with the purpose of VLRT, which is to encourage owners of vacant residential homes to make them available for use as long term accommodation.

Friendly societies

This Bill fully abolishes the land transfer duty exemption available to friendly societies and restricts the insurance duty exemption from 1 January 2025 to certain traditional friendly societies. Historically, friendly societies were mutual organisations which, by voluntary subscription, provide for the needs of their members and members' families in times of medical or financial hardship. The Duties Act currently provides a broad exemption for any transfer of dutiable property to, or insurance undertaken by, a friendly society. However, the existing provisions are available to any entity that was historically registered as a friendly society in Victoria before 1 July 1999 when State-based regulation of friendly societies was abolished. This means friendly societies that have demutualised or come under commercial control since 1999 can theoretically benefit from exemptions on high-value commercial transactions, when they were always intended to be confined to traditional societies. As the land transfer duty exemption is infrequently claimed and no longer appropriate to offer in modern circumstances, the Bill fully repeals this exemption. The Bill also narrows the insurance duty exemption from 1 January 2025 to traditional friendly societies, meaning those that have maintained both a mutual membership base and dominant activities falling within the scope of beneficial objects outlined in the former Friendly Societies (Victoria) Code: for example, the provision of health and welfare benefits, or financial and investment services. Friendly societies may still benefit from other duty exemptions where they are eligible, such as the charity exemption, and the exemption for friendly societies under the Land Tax Act will also continue to apply.

Apportionment of land tax under contracts of sale of land and term contracts

This Bill amends the definition of sale price in the *Sale of Land Act 1962* to clarify that this amount includes GST. The *Sale of Land Act 1962* prohibits the apportionment of land tax under contracts for the sale of land entered into on or after 1 January 2024. This is limited to contracts where the sale price is below a prescribed threshold amount, currently $10 million (and indexed every calendar year). The amendment removes ambiguity in the definition and meets the policy intent that the threshold amount is intended to include GST payable on the supply of the land. The amendment will commence on the day after Royal Assent.

Valuation of Land Act 1960 review

The Bill makes necessary amendments to give final effect to the transition of responsibility for rating and taxing valuations from local councils to the Valuer-General. In addition, it makes minor amendments to improve the operation of the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* by removing anomalies, correcting unintended outcomes, ensuring it is up to date with current practices and there is finality and certainty of the valuation record.

Since the 2023 general valuation cycle, the Valuer-General has been the sole valuation authority for all 79 councils in Victoria. The temporary provisions that were put in place in 2018 to support the transition from valuations being conducted by the relevant municipal council are being removed and updates made to ensure all responsibilities associated with making valuations have been appropriately transitioned to the Valuer-General. Minor consequential amendments are also being made to the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012*, the *Land Tax Act 2005*, the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and the *Local Government Act 1989* to replace references to 'valuation authority' with references to the 'Valuer-General'.

Ensuring the valuation objection and review process results in the correct valuation is critical to the integrity of the valuation system. To ensure a valuer, Tribunal or Court can consider all the relevant evidence when reviewing a valuation and determine the correct valuation, the Bill replaces the grounds of objection that a value is too high or too low with a single ground of objection that the value is 'incorrect'. This change will come into operation on 1 January 2025 and apply to all objections lodged on or after that date, irrespective of when the valuation was made.

Additional amendments to the objection, review and appeal provisions will ensure that reviews are based on the grounds of objection and the valuation objected to, and that an objection lodged in respect of a valuation used to assess land tax or windfall gains tax is limited to those bases of valuation used to calculate the tax. The amendments ensure that initiation of a review does not re-enliven the right to object to other bases of valuation that have no relationship to the assessment being challenged.

The amendments also ensure that the Valuer-General can appoint another valuer to consider an objection if the original valuer is unavailable, preserve the validity of the general valuation if it is returned late, and clarify that the timeframe for exchanging information on an objection starts when the valuer receives an objection, not when it was lodged with the valuation authority.

The Bill also amends the Valuation of Land Act 1960 to ensure the legislation remains clear, up to date and best supports the administration of the valuation framework in Victoria. This includes amendments to align the Act with updated administrative practices for serving valuation notices, informing the State Revenue Office about objection outcomes, and referring valuation objections to the Valuer-General. The amendments also address anomalies in the legislation and ensures consistent language and definitions are used across principal Acts. This includes referring to notices of valuation as being 'served' rather than 'given', providing consistent rules for when service of a notice of valuation is effective, aligning the definition of Australian Valuation Property Classification Code (AVPCC) with the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012* and amending provisions which deem a person to be aggrieved by a valuation, regardless of whether they are dissatisfied with the valuation.

Wage underpayments

The Bill amends the Payroll Tax Act to extend the period in which the Commissioner may reassess an employer's payroll tax liability more than 5 years after the initial assessment was made if an employer has underpaid wages. The existing TAA limits reassessments to 5 years after the original assessment in most circumstances. Sometimes this prevents the Commissioner from reassessing and collecting payroll tax from employers who have not paid wages or underpaid wages, including where underpayments occur over several years or only come to light many years after the fact. This change ensures that employers who underpay wages remain accountable for unpaid payroll tax including any associated penalty tax and interest. This amendment takes effect from the day after Royal Assent.

Land tax excluded trusts and clubs

This Bill amends the Land Tax Act to expand the definition of an excluded trust. Excluded trusts are not subject to the trust surcharge rate of land tax and the definition currently includes trusts with certain clubs, or

their members, as the sole beneficiary or beneficiaries. In 2020, the former concession for clubs was expanded so that non-racing clubs became eligible for a full exemption, while racing clubs continued to receive the concession. However, consequential amendments were not made to the definition of 'excluded trust' to reflect these changes. This Bill amends the definition to include a trust whose sole beneficiaries are non-racing clubs or their members. The definition of 'excluded trust' is also expanded to include trusts whose sole beneficiaries are non-profit sporting, outdoor recreational, outdoor cultural or similar outdoor organisations, which are also eligible for an exemption under the Land Tax Act. The amendment takes effect from the day after Royal Assent for the 2025 land tax year.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:53): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:54): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024 (the Bill).

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

Overview

A streamlined committal system will improve criminal justice system efficiencies and strengthen protections for victims and witnesses. To achieve this, the Bill amends the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* (the CPA) to:

- abolish the test for committal for indictable cases
- require a committal case conference be held in most indictable matters unless it is in the interests of justice that a case conference is not held
- define 'relevant' for the purposes of disclosing material in the brief of evidence
- allow for early committal in cases before the Supreme Court of Victoria (SCV)
- strengthen the test for granting leave to cross-examine witnesses pre-trial
- prohibit cross-examination at committal stage of any witness in sexual offence, family violence and stalking cases, and
- extend special hearings to child complainants and complainants with a cognitive impairment in family violence cases.

The Bill will also amend the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958* to require adult accused persons in custody to appear in a committal hearing via audio-visual link (AVL), unless a party requests and the court directs a physical appearance.

Human Rights Issues

The Charter rights that are relevant to the Bill are the:

- right to equality (section 8)
- right to protection of families and children (section 17)
- rights of children in the criminal process (section 23)
- right to a fair hearing (section 24), and
- rights in criminal proceedings (section 25).

Under the Charter, rights can be subject to limits that are reasonable and justifiable in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. I do not consider that the Bill limits rights under the Charter.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24) and rights in a criminal proceeding (section 25)

Section 24 of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to have the charge decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

Section 25(2) of the Charter sets out rights in criminal proceedings including specific minimum guarantees in these proceedings. Relevant to these amendments are the rights to:

- (2)(a) – be informed promptly and in detail of the nature and reasons for the charge
- (2)(b) – have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence to the charges
- (2)(c) – be tried without unreasonable delay
- (2)(d) – be tried in person, and to defend personally or through legal assistance
- (2)(g) – examine witnesses against the accused, unless otherwise provided for by law
- (2)(h) – obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his or her behalf under the same conditions as witnesses for the prosecution

The Bill introduces procedural changes, as discussed below, that will protect the right to a fair hearing for accused persons by promoting the appropriate resolution of cases, narrowing issues in dispute before trial, and improving the disclosure of prosecution case. Together, these changes will work together to promote the rights in section 25(2) while also achieving broader efficiencies in the justice system.

Abolishing the committal test

The Bill will abolish the test for committal and strengthen the existing case management role of the Magistrates' or Children's Courts (the lower courts) to preserve core functions of the committal system (amended section 141 of the CPA). I am satisfied that these reforms will maintain the right to a fair hearing for accused persons, as discussed below.

Historically, the main purpose of a committal hearing has been to assess whether there is sufficient evidence for an accused to stand trial, and to discharge an accused if this threshold has not been met. The CPA also provides other purposes of modern committal proceedings, which include ensuring a fair trial by, among other things, enabling the issues in contention to be adequately defined and by ensuring the prosecution case against the accused is adequately disclosed ahead of the trial.

While the committal test is intended to act as a 'filter' to provide independent scrutiny of an indictable prosecution, in practice, the threshold for committal is low and discharge rates in the MCV are negligible. Applying the committal test requires time and effort, and magistrates duplicate the work of trial judges. Further, the CPA allows the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to directly indict an accused for trial even if a magistrate discharges the case at committal stage.

By removing the time spent by magistrates assessing the evidence to apply the test for committal, the Bill will allow magistrates to focus on using their existing case management expertise to assist in narrowing the issues in dispute and facilitating earlier resolution of cases where appropriate. This promotes the right to a fair trial by retaining judicial oversight on the progress of the case, ensuring that prosecution and defence continue to be held accountable and the case progresses efficiently so that issues in dispute can be identified at an earlier stage of the proceeding.

Section 25(2)(h) of the Charter is also relevant as the Bill will remove the accused person's ability to call any witness or make any submission at a committal hearing. The accused will still be able to apply to cross-examine prosecution witnesses at a committal hearing (section 25(2)(g)). I am satisfied that the right to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on their behalf under the same conditions as witnesses for the prosecution remains available to an accused person as this right will be maintained at the trial stage. I am further satisfied that the removal of the ability to give or call evidence at the committal stage does not offend the 'equality of arms' principle necessary to ensure a fair hearing for the accused for the same reason. This principle means that each party to a proceeding must have a reasonable opportunity to present their case to the court under conditions that do not place that party at a substantial disadvantage in relation to their opponent. Further, an accused person will be able to test the evidence of the prosecution at committal stage, subject to leave being granted, by cross-examining prosecution witnesses where available and through early and full disclosure of the prosecution case. This will ensure an accused person understands the case against them and can adequately prepare a defence.

Default audiovisual link (AVL) attendance at a committal hearing

The Bill will make AVL the default mode of appearance for committal hearings for adult accused persons in custody, unless the court makes an order directing that the accused appear physically in court (amended section 42JA of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958*). In determining whether to make an order in the interests of justice, the court may consider the extent to which the accused may comprehend the proceedings or be able to give instructions to their legal representatives, preserving the accused person's right to a fair hearing and procedural fairness. This amendment reflects the removal of the test for committal and the accused person's ability to call witnesses or make submissions at a committal hearing. As a committal hearing will be limited to cross-examination of prosecution witnesses where leave has been granted, it is expected that committal hearings will be shorter and appearing via AVL will be more efficient. This amendment will promote an accused person's right to be tried without unreasonable delay under section 25(2)(c) of the Charter, as it recognises the constraints in physical transportation of accused persons in custody which could unnecessarily delay the proceeding. By facilitating attendance via AVL, the Bill seeks to improve efficiencies in a manner that does not undermine an accused's right to be tried in person (section 25(2)(d)).

Strengthened case management processes

The Bill will promote the rights of an accused person in a criminal proceeding by:

- requiring the lower courts to conduct committal case conferences for all cases in the committal stream (with limited exceptions) (amended section 127 of the CPA)
- defining 'relevant' for the purposes of disclosing material in the brief of evidence (amended section 110 of the CPA).

The Bill provides that the purpose of a committal case conference will be to facilitate the narrowing or resolution of issues in dispute and the disclosure of any material or information to enable appropriate resolution. This will enhance an accused person's ability to understand the charges against them at an earlier stage of the proceeding (section 25(2)(a)) and the requirement to provide adequate time to prepare a defence to the charges (section 25(2)(b)). Continued judicial oversight of a committal case conference will maintain effective procedural safeguards and minimise unreasonable delay to the progress of the case, facilitating the accused person's right to be tried without unreasonable delay (section 25(2)(c)).

Providing that, in the context of disclosure, 'relevant' includes material that might reasonably be expected to undermine the case for the prosecution or assist the case for the accused will enhance the likelihood of informants providing an accused person with relevant material, allowing adequate time to prepare a defence to the charges (section 25(2)(b)).

Strengthening cross-examination protections and expanding the prohibition on pre-trial cross examination

Pre-trial cross-examination is important for disclosure and to narrow the issues in dispute in a criminal process, but can require victims and witnesses to give evidence more than once in a proceeding, which can be inefficient and unnecessarily traumatic. There is scope to reduce re-traumatisation and achieve efficiencies in the criminal process while maintaining fair trial rights of an accused person.

The Bill amends the CPA to prohibit committal hearings in all sexual offence, family violence and stalking cases in the MCV, extending the current prohibition in sexual offence cases for a complainant who is a child or has a cognitive impairment (amended section 123 of the CPA). All pre-trial cross-examination of complainants in these cases will be prohibited (i.e. the complainant will only give evidence during a trial). To ensure a fair trial, the defence will be able to make an application for pre-trial cross-examination in the trial court of witnesses other than the complainant. This reform promotes the rights in section 24 and 25(2)(c) of the Charter by reducing delays in cases with vulnerable complainants, increasing efficiency and better utilising resources. I do not consider that the rights in section 24 and 25(2)(g) of the Charter are limited by this amendment as an accused person will still have the same opportunity to cross-examine witnesses before trial if leave is granted as permitted by law. The same procedure and test that apply in a committal hearing will apply to pre-trial cross-examination in the trial court. Additionally, existing safeguards continue to allow cross-examination of witnesses before a trial commences where there is a serious risk of an unfair trial if the cross-examination does not take place, ensuring the right to a fair trial is not limited.

The Bill strengthens the test for granting leave to cross-examine a witness at a committal hearing (amended section 124 of the CPA). This engages section 25(2)(g) of the Charter as applying a higher threshold for leave to cross-examine will narrow the ability to cross-examine witnesses at committal or pre-trial stage. The strengthened test will require an accused person to show that there are substantial reasons why, in the interest of justice, a witness should be cross-examined on an identified issue in dispute. I consider that the test is appropriately targeted to relate to issues in dispute, support disclosure and facilitate resolution. This strikes the right balance in minimising unnecessary trauma for witnesses and the right of the accused under

section 25(2)(g) to examine witnesses for the prosecution. Further, the strengthened test does not limit an accused person's ability to cross-examine witnesses on relevant issues and rather promotes an accused person's right to be informed promptly and in detail of the nature and reasons for the charge (section 25(2)(a)).

Early committal of cases in the Supreme Court of Victoria

The Bill will move SCV cases involving adult accused persons at an earlier stage to utilise the specialist case management expertise of the trial court (new section 140A of the CPA). This will expedite the trial-readiness of these cases, remove duplication in case management efforts and delays in progressing the case through the committal process. This amendment will ensure that the trial court can deal with pre-trial issues efficiently, promoting the right in section 25(2)(c) for the accused to be tried without unreasonable delays.

Children in the criminal process (section 23) and rights of a child in a criminal proceeding (section 25(3))

Sections 23 and 25(3) of the Charter protect the rights of children in the criminal process. Under section 23(2), a child accused must be brought to trial as quickly as possible. Section 25(3) of the Charter provides that a child charged with a criminal offence has the right to a procedure that takes account of their age and the desirability of promoting the child's rehabilitation.

As discussed above, the Bill promotes these rights by improving efficiencies in committal proceedings through the introduction of stronger case management procedures, abolishing the test for committal and strengthening the test for granting leave to cross-examine pre-trial. These measures aim to reduce delays, remove inefficiencies and promote early and appropriate resolution of cases.

The Bill will require the early committal of an accused person for trial in the SCV for cases that are ordinarily or routinely determined in the SCV. However, this new process will only apply to cases involving children where a child accused consents to early committal. Otherwise these cases will remain in the Children's Court until the matter is ready to progress to the SCV for trial or sentence. This promotes the rights in section 23 and 25(3) by providing a tailored procedure for children utilising the specialist expertise of the Children's Court.

Similarly, the Bill's reforms to make AVL the default mode of appearance for accused persons in custody appearing in committal hearings will not apply to children, reflecting that it is generally in the best interests of a child accused to appear in-person in court proceedings. Existing safeguards will continue to allow a child accused to opt-in to appear via AVL if it is in the interests of justice.

Protection of children (section 17)

Section 17(2) provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests.

The Bill promotes this right by introducing greater protections for child complainants and witnesses in cases involving a sexual offence, family violence or stalking offence subject to a committal proceeding. As outlined above, the Bill moves pre-trial cross-examination of witnesses other than the complainant in all sexual, family violence and stalking offence cases to the trial court (amended sections 123 and 198A of the CPA) ensuring that child witnesses in sexual offence, family violence and stalking cases are afforded greater protections that are available in the trial court.

The Bill extends the availability of special hearings to child complainants and to persons with a cognitive impairment in cases involving a family violence offence (currently available for these complainants in sexual offence proceedings) (amended section 369 of the CPA). Complainants in these cases will have their evidence taken in a special hearing where their oral testimony (examination-in-chief, cross-examination and re-examination) will be audio-visually recorded. This recording will be shown to the jury at the trial, and re-used if there are re-trials, avoiding the need for vulnerable complainants to give evidence more than once. This amendment will further protect the rights of children as child complainants in this cohort will be cross-examined only once over the course of the criminal proceeding, and only if the matter is listed for trial. These recordings may also be used in any subsequent re-trial.

Similar to sexual offence cases, the nature of family violence and stalking cases warrant additional protections for witnesses and complainants. I am satisfied that these special protections are necessary to protect vulnerable children from significant harm, and to minimise unnecessary trauma when giving evidence. I am also satisfied that the greater protections will ensure this cohort of children involved in criminal proceedings are more supported to participate in the criminal justice system.

Right to equality (section 8)

Section 8 provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination.

The Bill also raises the right to equality before the law, as it provides for protection from cross-examination for victims and witnesses at the committal stage in sexual offence, family violence and stalking matters (amended section 123 of the CPA).

While this leads to different treatment between persons or groups of persons in the criminal process based on the offence type, human rights law recognises that formal equality can lead to unequal outcomes. To achieve substantive equality in how victims and witnesses experience the protection of the law, special measures are required in sexual offence, family violence and stalking cases to minimise unnecessary trauma for vulnerable witnesses. While giving evidence and being cross-examined is confronting and distressing for many witnesses, the Bill recognises that cross-examination can be particularly traumatising for witnesses and vulnerable complainants in these cases. I am satisfied that these reforms will protect vulnerable complainants and witnesses by reducing duplication of cross-examination to minimise unnecessary trauma.

The Hon. Anthony Carbines MP
Minister for Police
Minister for Crime Prevention
Minister for Racing

Second reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:54): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill will make changes to Victoria's criminal procedure laws to enhance efficiency, reduce delays and protect victims and witnesses. The Bill will do so by streamlining committal processes while preserving the core functions of the existing committal system to achieve early and appropriate resolution of cases, and by strengthening protections for victims and witnesses.

Replacing the test for committal with improved case management processes

The system of commencing criminal proceedings in a lower court before committing the case to a higher court for trial or sentence emerged before independent police forces and prosecution agencies existed, when magistrates were required to review the evidence to filter out private prosecutions without merit.

The current committals system still requires magistrates to undertake this function by assessing whether the evidence is of sufficient weight to support a conviction for any indictable offence (the 'committal test'). While this requires significant time and resources in the lower courts, the threshold for committing matters is low and it is rare for a magistrate to decide not to commit an accused. In addition, even if a case is discharged at committal, the Director of Public Prosecution may commence proceedings by way of direct indictment.

The purposes of committal proceedings have evolved over time and are now more focused on achieving resolution of charges where possible, or narrowing the issues in dispute, providing disclosure so the accused understands the prosecution case and ensuring the case is ready for trial if it does not resolve for plea. While all Australian jurisdictions have made changes to their committal procedures in recent decades, including the abolition of the committal test in New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia, no single committal system is the same and Victoria's context presents unique challenges.

Following recommendations made by the Victorian Law Reform Commission, the Bill will abolish the committal test, allowing magistrates to instead focus more on active case management in the committal stage. The case management model in the lower courts will be strengthened to focus on disclosure and identification of issues to expedite resolution at an earlier stage.

In particular, the Bill will require the Magistrates' and Children's Courts to conduct a committal case conference in all committal proceedings, subject to limited exceptions. The purpose of this conference will be for parties to engage in resolution discussions and discuss key outstanding issues and disclosure. The committal case conference provides a forum for parties to engage in open discussions under the guidance of a magistrate exercising case management expertise. However, the court may dispense with the requirement to hold a committal case conference if satisfied it is in the interests of justice to do so.

The Bill will also implement a VLRC recommendation to clarify the meaning of 'relevant' in the context of disclosure. The new definition will apply in addition to the meaning of this term at common law. It will assist informants to understand that relevant material can include material that is or might reasonably be expected

to undermine the prosecution case or assist the case for the accused, and is based on a similar provision in New South Wales. The government will continue to monitor disclosure practices and consider future changes once the effect of the Bill's reforms becomes clear.

Strengthening cross-examination protections for complainants and other witnesses

The Bill will extend protections for complainants and witnesses before trial. Currently, most complainants and witnesses in indictable proceedings can be cross-examined multiple times, firstly at the committal hearing, then in a higher court during trial and sometimes before trial. For most complainants, giving evidence and being cross-examined can be one of the most difficult parts of the criminal process.

Current provisions provide protections for complainants and witnesses in sexual offence cases where the complainant is a child or a person with a cognitive impairment, including a prohibition on their cross-examination at the committal stage. The Bill will expand the prohibition on cross-examination before trial to include all complainants in sexual offence, family violence and stalking proceedings, recognising the particular challenges for complainants giving evidence in these cases. Witnesses in these cases will still be able to be cross-examined in the trial court before trial in appropriate cases. These reforms will be complemented by further family violence and stalking reforms the government proposes to introduce next year.

The Bill will also strengthen the test for magistrates granting leave for cross-examination at committal, to ensure any cross-examination that does occur is appropriately targeted to facilitate appropriate resolution of matters at an earlier stage. The strengthened test is intended to limit unnecessary cross-examination, including tactical evidence testing. However, it will not be an impossible hurdle for the accused to overcome in appropriate cases where the court is satisfied there are substantial reasons why, in the interests of justice, leave to cross-examine should be granted.

The strengthened test will narrow the scope of issues that can be raised in cross-examination to ensure cross-examination is relevant, and will balance the interests of the accused with the interests of the witnesses, the prosecution, and the public interest in the administration of justice. Together with recent amendments to require magistrates to give reasons for granting cross-examination applications, these reforms will improve consistency in the application of the test for leave to cross-examine at committal stage, reduce duplication and minimise the stress and trauma to victims and witnesses.

The Bill will also extend certain protections at trial stage for complainants who are children or persons with a cognitive impairment in family violence proceedings, in addition to the existing protections for this category of complainants in sexual offence proceedings.

The government will monitor the effectiveness of these proposed new protections and if needed, will consider further reforms to further limit cross-examination and minimise unnecessary trauma to complainants and witnesses.

Early committal of cases to the Supreme Court

The Bill will require that Supreme Court cases are committed at an earlier stage to expedite case management by the trial court. This will legislate fast-track procedures to bypass committal hearings for homicide matters, building on a successful pilot scheme implemented by the Supreme Court which has resulted in earlier resolution of cases.

Mandatory early committal of these cases will only apply where the accused is an adult, in recognition of the specialist jurisdiction of the Children's Court. However, as is the case currently, a child accused will be able to consent to early committal to the Supreme Court. For joint trials involving a co-accused who is not charged with a Supreme Court matter, early committal will only occur with the consent of all accused persons in the case.

These reforms will reduce duplication of case management efforts, allow the Court to apply its expertise in determining pre-trial issues earlier and reduce delay by avoiding cases having to 'double queue' for both committal hearing dates in the Magistrates' Court and trial or plea listings in the Supreme Court.

Improvements to the committal system will allow for further justice system efficiencies

As the reforms in this Bill will make committal hearings shorter in duration and more procedural in nature, there will be less need for accused persons to appear physically in the courtroom at committal hearings. This Bill will change the default appearance at committal hearings for accused adults in custody from in person to an audiovisual link from their prison location. This will lower the costs of transport to and from court and staffing court cells, minimise disruption to prison operations and placements for accused persons, minimise court delays due to accused persons not arriving in court as scheduled, and reduce security risks associated with people leaving and re-entering prisons.

In some circumstances there may be a practical difficulty with an audiovisual link appearance, such as where there are co-accused or interpreters or if audiovisual link facilities are not available. A physical in-person appearance may also be in the interests of justice to ensure the accused understands the proceedings. In such cases, the Magistrates' Court will be able to direct the accused to appear in person at a committal hearing.

Recognising the specialist jurisdiction of the Children's Court, the default audiovisual appearance at committal will only apply to cases where the accused is an adult.

Allowing investigators and authorised water officers to witness statements in criminal prosecutions

The Bill will amend the description of Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) staff in Schedule 3 of the CPA, to ensure ASIC investigators can continue to witness statements in a preliminary brief, full brief or hand-up brief following a restructure in ASIC. The Bill will also add authorised water officers appointed under the Water Act 1989 to Schedule 3. This will address inefficiencies currently caused by these officers not being able to witness statements when carrying out their duties.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:55): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:56): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Charter), I table a statement of compatibility for the **Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024** (Bill).

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

Overview

The Bill will repeal redundant and spent provisions in Victorian legislation to ensure Victorian legislation remains accurate and up to date.

In particular, the Bill will include amendments to the following Acts:

- *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012*;
- *Docklands Act 1991*;
- *Filming Approval Act 2014*;
- *Greenhouse Gas Geological Sequestration Act 2008*;
- *Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988*;
- *Road Safety Act 1986*; and
- *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarungmurron) Act 2017*.

Since the Bill repeals provisions that are already redundant or spent, it does not have any substantive legal effect. On this basis, I consider that the amendments under the Bill do not engage any rights under the Charter.

Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ambulance Services

Second reading

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:56): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Bill before the House, the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024, is a mechanism for reviewing Victoria's statute books to ensure Victorian statutes remain clear, relevant and accurate.

The Bill will repeal redundant and spent provisions in Victorian legislation to ensure Victorian legislation remains accurate and up to date.

The Bill will include amendments to the following Acts:

- *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012*;
- *Docklands Act 1991*;
- *Filming Approval Act 2014*;
- *Greenhouse Gas Geological Sequestration Act 2008*;
- *Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988*;
- *Road Safety Act 1986*; and
- *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarungmurron) Act 2017*.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:56): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 13 November.

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:57): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, but can I take a moment at the outset just to acknowledge the tragedy that occurred yesterday at Auburn South Primary School. Given we are debating an education bill this morning I think it is only fitting following the statements by the member for Hawthorn, the Leader of the Opposition, this morning and of course you, Deputy Speaker, about the tragedy that occurred yesterday. It is simply heartbreaking for the school community there and of course for the family of the little boy who lost his life. There really are no words. I think when all of us heard the news yesterday we felt absolutely sick to our stomachs. When you drop your kids off at school you think that they will be safe and you do not have to worry about these sorts of incidents happening. My heart just goes out to the school community. On behalf of everyone here I am sure I speak in wishing that community the very best when it comes to what will be a long and painful recovery, I am sure. The scar will be felt by that community for some time.

To the families of the children that are injured and are in hospital, I think it was promising this morning to hear that those children are in a stable condition, and we wish them the very best and the speediest of recoveries. To the school community, to the principal Marcus Wicher, to the staff and of course to the first responders – I am sure, Deputy Speaker, you would know as well the Boroondara police; I reached out to them this morning just to pass on my best wishes to those police officers that did have to attend the scene, and the inspector there noted how challenging it can be for those officers when they do have to attend to children who are injured – our very best wishes. We will be thinking of them all over the coming days, weeks, months and years as they do try to recover from this shocking incident.

The purpose of the bill before us today is to improve the regulation of schools and other educational institutions across our state. Let me say from the outset – I will remove any excitement from what might come – that the opposition will not be opposing the passage of this bill through the Parliament. Can I thank the office of the Minister for Education, Nakita and Fiona in particular, for assisting the opposition with the briefing and with our questions, and the department as well for ensuring that we had all the information we needed as we looked into the detail of this bill and briefed members on this side of the house.

I will speak briefly to the key measures contained in this bill before of course making some reflections more broadly on the education system here in Victoria. First, the bill contains a number of provisions aimed at strengthening the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, known more commonly as the VRQA.

The bulk of the changes outlined in the bill appear to be geared towards giving the VRQA greater oversight and regulatory authority over entities that may be considered to be unregistered schools. These amendments are designed to adequately deter providers, including schools and school boarding premises, that are operating without registration or approval, and the expanded VRQA powers are coupled with increased maximum penalties for unregistered schools or boarding premises.

These changes have likely been driven by a high-profile case of what is known as Riverside Grammar, which is an unregistered school located in Hawthorn. I know that the previous Minister for Education James Merlino has been quoted in the media regarding his concerns about unregistered entities masquerading as schools. Riverside Grammar provides an education-like environment for what they term 'troubled teens' but does not meet any of the education, child safety, or quality standards that schools must meet. Students, if we were to call them that, at the previous iteration of Riverside Grammar, which actually operated in the electorate of Kew, described an environment that does not tend to align with any focus on the education- or curriculum-based activities that should underpin what we know in Victoria as a school. We are looking here at a bill today that looks to make sure that unregistered schools that are using terms like 'grammar', which would suggest that they are potentially acting as schools, are not doing so without the appropriate registration and the checks and balances that are required around them. In the case of Riverside Grammar the VRQA did investigate it and found it to be an unregistered school, but as this bill looks to do, unfortunately the accountability mechanisms in the current regulatory framework were not able to provide the appropriate legal consequences as a result of that finding.

Specifically, the bill amends the act to increase the maximum penalties for entities found to be conducting an unregistered school or school boarding premises in Victoria. I note that this bill will bring the penalties for these offences in line with the penalties for similar offences in other legislation, specifically section 103 of the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010, which provides penalties for the offence of operating an education and care service without approval. These amendments will increase the maximum penalties for unregistered schools or school boarding premises from 10 penalty units, which is currently equivalent to just under $2000, to 120 units, which is currently equivalent to nearly $24,000. This is the penalty for individuals. For body corporates the penalty under this bill is going to be 600 penalty units, which is currently equivalent to nearly $120,000. I note that these represent significant increases in the penalties for the offence of carrying on an unregistered school or boarding premises. However, it is appropriate that there is a penalty for individuals or organisations who seek to operate a school without submitting themselves to the various quality assurance processes that Victorians rightly expect of any school who purports to carry that label.

The concept of a school has generally been accepted to mean an institution providing instruction according to an approved curriculum, and within the act itself there is a definition of what a school is – that it operates for those who are of school age during school hours. There is no definition of course of what an unregistered school is, but if an organisation or a body meets the definition of a school, then it should have gone through the appropriate registration requirements to meet that definition.

Clearly there is a need for regulatory oversight to ensure that schools maintain academic and child safety standards in order that they can continue to wear that label. Diversity in education is important, and it is why the Liberals and Nationals have long supported educational choice for parents across the public, independent and faith-based sectors, but we cannot tolerate organisations touting themselves as schools if they fail to meet the fundamental criteria required to meet the definition of a school and they are not providing those required education curriculum and child safety standards that must be met in any organisation that is operating as a school.

Importantly, parents must be able to have confidence that any school that they send their child to in Victoria, whether it be government or independent of faith based, will meet the basic safety and education standards that we expect here in Victoria. Allowing unregistered schools to persist could undermine public confidence in the education system as well as put already vulnerable youth in an unsupervised and unregulated environment. For that reason the opposition will not be opposing the bill before us today.

The bill also makes a number of other amendments to the oversight and authority of the VRQA, and let me just go through those briefly. It will clarify that the VRQA may share information with a prescribed person or body without receiving a written request. It will enable the VRQA to issue notices to produce and notices to comply to a person, body or school that the VRQA has a reasonable cause to believe is required to be regulated under the act. It will remove the show cause process where cancellation of the registration of a non-government school or boarding premises is voluntary or the school or school boarding premises has ceased to operate. It will expand the scope of matters in relation to which the VRQA may accept an enforceable undertaking from a non-school senior secondary or foundation secondary provider, an institution approved to provide courses to overseas students or an institution approved to operate a student exchange program. Finally, it will allow the VRQA to consider whether an applicant for registration or re-registration as a registered training organisation has ever failed to comply with the child safety standards. Just on that final point, we did speak during the bill briefing about the importance of being able to ensure that any application for registration or re-registration when it comes to an RTO has never had a breach of the child safety standards. I understand that this has been an oversight previously in the drafting of the legislation, and we are looking to ensure that this is fixed in this piece of legislation today to ensure that child safety standards are being checked and met at every possible opportunity.

I do note that the coalition spoke to a wide range of stakeholders about the bill before us today, and no stakeholders put forward any major concerns. But there was a potential concern more broadly about these provisions being aimed at widening the VRQA's oversight and whether or not they could unintentionally capture homeschooling families who potentially group together an occasion or regularly for particular activities, such as excursions or to examine a particular topic or to pool resources on particular occasions. This concern was noted with the departmental staff in the opposition bill briefing and separately with the minister's office, and I am confident that this is certainly not the intention of the bill nor the current focus of the VRQA. It is highly unlikely that these types of activities would be captured within the definition of a school in order to meet the threshold for being an unregistered school, as a registered homeschooling environment is carved out of the definition of a school here in Victoria. Nonetheless the opposition will certainly be monitoring the effects of this legislation, and if it does appear that legitimate homeschooling activities are being caught up by these provisions, we will certainly ensure any reform required to ensure that these operations can continue and are not unfairly punished.

Another technical change in this bill is to allow principals to nominate another person or group of people to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements in accordance with any ministerial order. This is a very sensible reform, because it will reduce the administrative burden – potentially only slightly, but it will somewhat go to reducing the administrative burden – on our school principals, who we know already carry so much weight when it comes to the operation and the governance of the schools which they lead. Currently principals have

to approve every work experience and structured workplace learning arrangement for students at their schools. In larger schools where dozens of students undertake either work experience or structured workplace learning, the current framework would certainly create an unreasonable workload for principals, who should be able to delegate this responsibility to others within their team.

I am sure many of us, if not all of us, regularly have work experience students in our office. Particularly we know that year 10 students tend to undertake work experience at most schools across the state. To have the principal have to sign off on every one of those arrangements is a burden that we should look to lessen, and this piece of legislation certainly does allow that. What the bill will allow principals to do is delegate the responsibility in a way that makes sense for the schools' individual circumstances, so the power could be delegated to an individual – another teacher or another member of the leadership team such as a careers coordinator – in one school or in another school, if it would make sense to do so, to a particular group of people, such as year 10 teachers, since that is often the year level that undertakes work experience, so that each year 10 teacher or homeroom teacher could then approve those arrangements for the students that they know. Devolving this coordinating role also empowers senior staff, who are probably best placed to know what arrangements are going to work for each individual student. This is a sensible measure and it is one that we support, but unfortunately I fear that it is probably a drop in the ocean when it comes to truly relieving the huge burden on our school principals and the workload that they currently bear. Just touching on that point, we do know that here in Victoria we have a teacher workforce crisis; just today there are over 2000 vacancies when it comes to teacher roles in Victoria. I will come back to this issue shortly, but let me first go through some remaining provisions of the bill.

The bill also contains a number of measures that affect the boards within the education and also the training and skills portfolios. I acknowledge the work of my colleague the member for Evelyn in that space. The bodies that are affected by these amendments are the pools of the Merit Protection Boards, the pools of the Disciplinary Appeals Boards, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the council of the Victorian Institute of Teaching, the VIT hearing panel pool, the board of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, the Adult, Community and Further Education Board and, finally, the board of AMES Australia.

The measures that affect these boards are aimed at standardising and streamlining provisions relating to the process by which members are appointed and the resignation process for members, as well as fixing the remuneration and fees as they relate to these boards and board members. As I understand it from the discussion during the bill briefing, there is non-alignment particularly when it comes to how if members of these boards choose to resign from their roles, whether that resignation is to the minister or to the Governor in Council, and the bill is looking to streamline the process by which those resignations can take place.

Finally, I note that the bill makes various changes to the act to improve the consistency of terminology and also make some minor and technical amendments to improve its operation and clarity. One of the minor amendments is to update the wording of the act to reflect the name change from the Catholic Education Commission to the Victorian Catholic Education Authority (VCEA). I just wanted to take the opportunity to recognise the Victorian Catholic Education Authority, which is now the peak body for Catholic school education here in Victoria. I was delighted to attend the commissioning of that new body earlier this year. It is an important body that does advocate on behalf of all the Catholic schools in Victoria. There are over 450 Catholic schools in Victoria, and this body not only advocates on their behalf but ensures that their funding requirements and needs are met right down to each individual Catholic primary school. It was previously known as the Catholic Education Commission, and it changed in 2023 as part of the renewal process that it is going through to enhance its governance structure, initiated by the church in 2021. We have seen Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) also form in recent time, and the administration there looked to take over the operation and

running of all Catholic primary schools here in Melbourne, and then of course the regional bodies do similar work across Victoria.

Can I acknowledge the former education minister and former Deputy Premier James Merlino, as the chair of the new VCEA; and people known personally to me, Patricia Cowling, the former principal of Genazzano, as a member of the board and of course Brian Loughnane. I have had an opportunity to meet with their new chief executive Professor Elizabeth Labone and have a really positive discussion about how we can ensure that we continue to advocate for the important role in this state that Catholic education plays and ensure that choice remains an option for parents here in Victoria. I know that the VCEA and the MACS as well were very disappointed in the government's design of the $400 school bonus, as it is known, in the recent budget not flowing through to those most needy in Catholic schools, and particularly Catholic primary schools, right across the state. I have spoken to my regional colleagues at the table here about the particular impact the design of that initiative has had on regional Catholic schools that have students in need in high numbers in low socio-economic categories and that not flowing through. Yet every student in a government school regardless of their socio-economic status is receiving that $400 bonus. The design of that is just not equitable and is not fair. That is something that Catholic education are extremely disappointed in, and they will continue to advocate on behalf of those families.

I now want to return back to the point in this bill around the small, maybe tiny, reduction in principal workload when it comes to delegating the role of approving work experience. While indeed in this bill the teacher workload is acknowledged as an area of concern by the government, we need to acknowledge more broadly that we are in the midst of a workforce crisis in our education system. We on this side of the chamber have been calling out this crisis for many years and urging immediate action from the government to help ease the workload on our hardworking teachers and principals across the state. It has been great to see our colleagues in the other place join that call in recent months with the publication of the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into the state education system in Victoria. As the president of the Victorian Association of State Secondary School Principals Colin Axup told the inquiry:

> … it would be fair to say that staffing is the number one game in town at the moment.

This is certainly what teachers and parents are telling me when I visit schools across the state. No matter which school I visit, and I visit schools very regularly, it is the number one issue. In particular principals will raise the challenges when it comes to workforce, when it comes to retaining teachers and of course when it comes to hiring new teachers, and nowhere is this more acute than in regional Victoria and in Melbourne's growth suburbs. It seems now in Victoria that being fully staffed on any given day is a rare occurrence, and it never seems to stay that way, given the high levels of teacher burnout and teachers exiting the system. We can and we must do better when it comes to attracting and retaining the teachers we need in our schools. We need to do so for our students, because they deserve certainty when it comes to who will be teaching them.

Unfortunately we regularly hear of reports of doubled-up classrooms or students being sent home – VCE students being sent home – because there is not a teacher to teach them in the classroom on any given day. Of course there is the revolving door when it comes to relief teachers and not having that stability in the classroom to ensure that students are given the very best chance to learn, and we are seeing it reflected in the outcomes when it comes to educational outcomes here in Victoria. We had the NAPLAN results recently, which showed that one-third of Victorian students are not meeting reading and numeracy standards when it comes to NAPLAN – one-third. That is 300,000 Victorian students that are not meeting those standards, that are not being taught to read and that are not being taught the basics in mathematics. Unfortunately what we are seeing, and the Auditor-General has delivered a report on this, is the gap is widening for those disadvantaged students in particular.

Disadvantaged students have been falling further and further behind over recent years here in Victoria, and unless you are able to have the consistency of a classroom teacher and you know that you are

going to be able to go to school each day and continue what you were learning yesterday in a coordinated fashion and that that teacher is able to deliver the curriculum – particularly in those early years, those primary years – then those educational outcomes are going to continue to be at risk here in Victoria.

We also know that teachers are leaving the system because of the incredible workload that they are shouldering. There are – particularly from the committee report, which I mentioned earlier, from the other place – some recommendations that I would highly commend to the minister and the government. I note from that report that finding 14 is:

> The expected teacher shortfall is a serious issue for the state education system that warrants significant and sustained attention and intervention.

I could not agree more with the finding from Legal and Social Issues Committee from the Legislative Council. We need significant and sustained attention on this issue and we need real intervention, because whatever measures the government have in place – and I know the minister and the government like to claim $1.6 billion in workforce initiatives when it comes to the teacher crisis – they are not working.

We recently, through this report, saw that the incentive-based initiative that is designed to incentivise teachers to move to the regions through providing them with an uplift in their pay – a cash incentive – is not having the desired effect. It is not keeping teachers in those locations, and that means our regional schools in particular are seeing this turnover and turnover of staff – if they can find staff in the first place.

The member for South-West Coast and I visited Portland Secondary College, and they were struggling to find maths and science teachers for their VCE students. We are in the midst of the VCE exam period at the moment, and I wish all of our VCE students here in Victoria the best of luck over the coming weeks. I know it can be very stressful period, but they should know they have worked long and hard to get to this point and they are very well placed. Regardless of the outcome, there is always a pathway forward. But VCE students at Portland Secondary College are not able to access VCE teachers when it comes to maths and science. If we think about some of those subjects, whether maths methods or physics, some of those subjects are prerequisites for university placements. You need to be able to study those subjects and complete those subjects and do well in those subjects at a high school level to be able to then take on the courses at university that you want to do. If you do not have access to those subjects because there are not teachers in place, then it is simply limiting your options at the age of 17 or 18 about what you might want to pursue in the future in terms of your professional career. Despite these incentives in place that the government likes to hang their hat on, they are not having any impact. We are not seeing those places filled and we are not seeing those places filled for the long term.

I will touch on something that came up at the discussions we had with Portland Secondary College and many other schools that I have visited in the regions. One of the issues with these short-term incentives is they do cause issues within the existing class of teachers at that school, who may have been there for five, 10, 15 or even 20 years. They are not seeing a reward for remaining in place. They are not seeing a reward for being a teacher and delivering all that they can their students for 10 years or 20 years, but they are seeing younger teachers come in and being offered these financial incentives, seeing an uplift in their pay, and that creates a two-tiered system that is really unfair within our education system here in Victoria.

The report's recommendation 31 stated:

> The Department of Education should thoroughly evaluate its teacher recruitment intervention programmes in addressing expected teacher shortfall.

The committee – and I will say it was a committee that was represented by government members, opposition members and members of the crossbench – acknowledged that what is happening at the

moment is the government's initiatives are simply not working. We are not seeing enough teachers join the profession and we are certainly not seeing enough teachers stay in the profession. We have seen multiple reports recently about the attrition rate when it comes teachers here in Victoria. We saw recently in the *Herald Sun* a report around the number of younger teachers, graduate teachers, leaving the profession in droves when it comes to their registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. Those younger teachers are not re-registering, and the exodus from the teaching profession is from those younger teachers.

We know that one in five graduate teachers will leave the profession in the first five years.

One of the findings from this report a couple of weeks ago was the fact that we have an incredibly cluttered curriculum here in Victoria. We have a cluttered curriculum, and young teachers in particular, graduate teachers, leave university, come into the classroom and are not prepared to or do not even understand how to start to navigate that curriculum – what to prioritise – and it is reflected in our educational outcomes. When we see those incredibly stark numbers of a third of Victorian students not meeting the proficiency standards when it comes to literacy and numeracy it is clear that we are not prioritising what is needed in our curriculum – those foundational skills, those skills that are going to be needed to go through the following years of schooling into those secondary years – and the further and further behind that children are in those primary school years, the harder it is to catch up in those secondary school years.

The committee made some excellent recommendations to ease the teacher workforce crisis, and I want to make a mention of them here today. Recommendation 32 called on the Victorian Institute of Teaching to adjust employer requirements in the 'permission to teach' category of teacher registration to fast-track the employment of subject matter experts in Victorian schools, and that could certainly go some way in terms of dealing with the issue I spoke about in regional Victoria and the example at Portland Secondary College when it comes to maths and science teachers.

With my time remaining I would say that while the opposition is not opposing this bill today, for those on the other side of the house that will no doubt say that Victoria is the Education State, it simply could not be further from the truth. We have underfunded, overcrowded schools and we have short-staffed schools here in Victoria, and we are not delivering for students.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:27): I will just take the liberty of echoing the sentiments that have been expressed thus far and sharing my personal condolences for the incident that occurred at Auburn South Primary School yesterday – an absolutely tragic incident for the whole school community. I certainly share my deepest sadness for them and also for the first responders; it must have been extremely emotional and difficult to handle, so I just wanted to share that from the outset before I move to the bill.

I will now move to the bill, noting that we are talking specifically about the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. At the crux, the bill amends the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to strengthen the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority – there is certainly a sound rationale for the changes being brought about here, some very practical elements; and just as an overview, to allow school principals to nominate other persons or classes of persons to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements; to streamline and standardise processes relating to board appointments to education portfolio entities and skills and TAFE portfolio entities; and to reduce the administrative burden for the authority, other portfolio entities, regulated entities and school principals.

Before I proceed further to do a deeper dive into the bill I just did want to pick up on a couple of points that were made by the member for Kew. I am a little bit confused about whether the Liberals still want to proceed with targeted financial incentives or not. It seemed like there was an inference that they should be cut, because they were being so harshly criticised. Just to put on the table what they actually are doing: our targeted financial incentives program is making sure that we have a teacher in every

classroom right around the state. Over half of the 2019–20 and 2020–21 cohort have continued at their targeted financial incentive school, and over 75 per cent of these cohorts remain in the government school system. For the 2021–22 cohort 79 per cent of the 250 TFI – sorry, I am just making a little acronym there – teachers who received upfront financial incentives remained at their original TFI school, and we have filled almost 700 of the 830 places in hard-to-staff schools right across Victoria, with the most recent 230 places funded in the 2024–25 budget update.

So I think perhaps rather than rolling tropes and things that are being stated in the chamber, which do not really come back to the facts, it is important to look at the stats as they are, and clearly we can see by those statistics that good work is being put into schools to keep young teachers there into the future, and we actually can see an outcome from the statistics that I have just read out to the chamber, contrary to what was just inferred a few moments ago.

More broadly, when we are looking at teacher recruitment, the government school teaching workforce in Victoria has grown by almost 1700 teaching staff since June 2023. Again, we can see that those numbers speak to a significant increase in the numbers, so to suggest that nothing has been done, nothing has happened, I certainly take exception to those inferences, because it does not correlate with the actual numbers. Since 2019 – and see, there is the other thing. Did you notice how I said, 'Since 2019'? We are now in 2024. Clearly action has been taken over a number of years – it is not that nothing has been done – and significant action. I know that the opposition suggested that an investment of $1.6 billion in schools is not significant. I would actually seek to again prosecute the contrary of that. What does that actually look like? $1.6 billion in school workforce initiatives, with around 8000 more registered teachers in 2023 than in 2020. If the opposition thinks 8000 more registered teachers is nothing, well, I am going to take a contrary position to that, not to be deliberately argumentative, but I think when we are in the chamber we need to speak in facts, and I think it is clear that we should represent things as they are.

As part of that funding, we have provided secondary school teaching degree scholarships resulting in a 23 per cent increase in university students seeking to undertake a teaching degree course in Victoria in 2024. The state budget 2024–25 continues to invest in our teachers by providing an additional $139 million to attract more staff back into teaching and from abroad. The Productivity Commission found that Victoria's student–teacher ratios have improved by over 10 per cent since 2015, after four years of neglect from those opposite. Victoria's teaching workforce has achieved higher growth than any other state or territory, accounting for more than half the national growth in Australia's teaching workforce in 2023. You may have wondered why I laboured those points. It is just that I really was a little taken aback by the fairly scathing criticism of our education system and the efforts of our government to drive the best possible education outcomes for students but also to support our wonderful teachers, who we respect on so many levels for the incredible education opportunities that they drive for students in this state.

There are a couple of other points that I did want to make. Let us be really clear about this: only under a Labor government will Victoria remain an education state. Education is the most important public investment we can make in our future. Our government has set a strong foundation of education in Victoria, and this bill builds on previous reforms and initiatives we have delivered. Let us take phonics, for example. We updated the Victorian teaching and learning model to embed explicit teaching at its core, including the use of systematic synthetic phonics. Let me tell you, this is a fantastic reform. It is the right reform. We were at South Melbourne Primary School the other day, and this is absolutely the latest in education. I saw the kids, they were actually slanting. What that means is they get the little whiteboards – this is the latest technology; I am not just saying this – in terms of getting that constant accountability and working in with their teacher to make sure that they can properly pronounce words and they get those fundamental skills that they need to set them up for their future, and it is happening right in this state, and we certainly are striving forward on that front. I am very excited because I know what it delivers, particularly because we have been talking about students who are disadvantaged, and they are the ones who have been most inclined to be compromised – and this is a universal principle,

I should say – where they cannot necessarily get read to at home, where they are not getting that embedded.

However, with phonics we can see this is really cutting through and helping to make sure all Victorian students get the educational outcomes that they deserve, absolutely being able to achieve everything that they want in their lives.

With the school saving bonus, let us just be clear about that, because that was getting a bit smashed up as well. The school saving bonus will provide $400 in support for Victorian school-aged students in term 4 2024 for use on 2025 school costs. Government school information – if your child, or children, attends a government school, the school saving bonus for government school students can be accessed via the school saving bonus online system in November 2024. The bonus can be used towards 2025 school activities, including camps, trips, excursions and incursions, outdoor education, graduations, school uniforms and textbooks. Cutting to the chase, on non-government school information, if your child, or children, attends a non-government school, the $400 school saving bonus will be provided directly to your school to students eligible for the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund – just to be clear about that so that we are providing accurate information in the chamber on eligibility for this wonderful support in a cost-of-living crisis as well. This is helping to support families and carers across the state to be able to give their kids the best possible school experience, whether it is school books, whether it is uniforms, outdoor education, swimming or other things. Finally, I should say very pragmatic and appropriate reforms are being brought about by the bill, and I commend it to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (11:37): I am pleased to rise to say a few words on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, which as the member for Kew has indicated, the opposition is not opposing. These are very much uncontroversial amendments in this piece of legislation relating to the appropriate registration and regulation of schools and boarding houses around the state, and it would appear that this is particularly aimed at one particular organisation that operated out of the inner city in recent times. It is important that schools and school boarding houses are appropriately qualified and appropriately registered so that there is government oversight, that any organisation that is either a school or purporting to be a school is doing so in the correct manner and that parents can have confidence that any school they send their children to, government or independent, will meet some basic safety and education standards. We certainly support strengthening these arrangements. Allowing unregistered schools to persist could undermine public confidence in the education system, whether it be the public system, the private independent system or Catholic schools as well.

I note that this is apposite to a proposal in my own electorate, Corner Inlet College, which some people are seeking to establish near Foster. They are going through the process at the moment. There has been a little bit of controversy, as there often is with a development in a rural area just out of Foster, but the Minister for Planning has already given a planning permit for that college to go ahead. They are intending to open as a co-educational independent secondary school next year – starting with years 7 and 8 I think is their intention. I note on the Corner Inlet College website the establishment and operation of Corner Inlet College is subject to Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) approval, so clearly they are going through the process and doing the right thing in making sure that they do have that appropriate approval, which is the correct thing to do.

This legislation is strengthening some of the provisions that are applied to the VRQA. There are quite a number of amendments, and I think the member for Kew has gone to most of them in detail, but the obvious one is increasing the maximum penalties for carrying on or conducting an unregistered school or school boarding premises.

And it was a little surprise to me to find that the penalty currently for someone committing those offences is only 10 penalty units or just under $2000. This bill will increase the maximum penalty to 120 penalty units, or around $23,000 for an individual, or 600 penalty units and nearly $120,000 for a body corporate. While we could argue over the quantum or otherwise, that certainly I think is a step

in the right direction to ensure that there is an appropriate deterrent to anyone doing the wrong thing with respect to setting up a school. So there are certainly some good parts of this legislation, as I said, and we are not opposing it.

I will just touch on some of the debate. I was only partly listening to the member for Albert Park and the member for Kew talking about teacher incentives, but certainly I know talking to principals in my electorate that they have regularly had problems in the last couple of years filling the teacher requirements of their schools. I have asked in the past about teacher incentives. One of the challenges of those incentives for rural and regional schools is if we say, 'Well, we can't get a maths teacher at Sale College,' for example, and we offer someone an extra $50,000 to come and to fill a gap, that is all well and good until the teacher that is already there says, 'Well, hang on, I'm already here and I'm already teaching maths' – or teaching science or whatever – 'and now this person's come in and is getting paid a hell of a lot more than me.' That becomes an HR issue then that the principal has to manage, and there is some question I think as to how successful that program has been. I am not knocking it; it is an attempt to try and get teachers into locations where they are needed, but it is not always straightforward and simple that these sorts of incentives will work and lead to a harmonious workplace.

Speaking of which, another provision in this is the section that empowers school principals to delegate their authority when it comes to work experience. I do not personally know a bit about this, but it is something I have been familiar with in my life because my mother was a careers teacher as well as teaching English and history and geography and many other things, mostly English. I was always well versed in English, and it is probably why I became a journalist, because whenever I asked how to spell something or how something was written, Mum would say, 'Look it up in the dictionary. I'm not going to just tell you; you have to learn.' She was fantastic at that, but she also had for many, many years the role of careers teacher at Kildare College in Traralgon, a Brigidine Catholic school originally for girls. She ended up actually teaching me briefly when the school went co-ed.

But Mum had a lot of work finding spots for a couple of hundred year 10 girls every year around the place. I was just thinking about it now. Had I been the local member at the time, Mum would have been a great fundraiser, I reckon, because she would have known every business in the Latrobe Valley because she was constantly on the phone to people trying to find spots. As I said, I ended up being a journalist, but in year 10 I loved woodwork and I was going to be a carpenter. Well, I was meant to go to a builder. He had to pull out at the last minute, and I did my formal work experience with a cabinet-maker. It was not the best experience, and it probably started me thinking about alternatives. One of my mates actually talked about journalism, and hey presto, a few months later I did additional work experience. I actually did work experience at the *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, where there was a young up-and-coming sports reporter by the name of Tim Bull. So it is funny how things go around.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: I did then go and report on you, member for South-West Coast.

But that certainly is an issue for principals. The principals I talk to, whether primary or secondary, do an amazing amount of work. I sometimes liken them to being an MP because they do a lot of work, they do not get much credit for anything that goes right and they have to deal with a lot of rubbish – difficulty with parents, students and all the things. So if we can lighten their load a little bit, then I think that is a good thing. I wish them all well, and hopefully we will continue that strong program of work experience for kids, because it is fantastic to help them decide what they want to do with their lives, just as it did with me, and here I am now.

The government talks a big game about education, and certainly there has been investment. My concern has always been the lack of investment being spread right around the state, particularly in Gippsland South. We have had a couple of good programs; Sale specialist school and Yarram Primary School have had funding and belatedly, after a six-year campaign, Korumburra Secondary College,

which was fantastic. But I am still campaigning for Sale College, which is a desperately needed big rebuild in my electorate. Sale College is across two campuses; that causes massive problems for the school in managing both students and teachers, but more particularly the Macalister campus is in a pretty ordinary state. The former minister Mr Merlino did provide $3 million for the master plan, in the 2021 budget I think it was. But here we are three years later, that master plan is done, the planning is all ready to go for the new site, there is a site that has now been sold to the department by the local council but we do not have any money for the school to go ahead, so that needs to occur, and likewise for the Foster Primary School. Again we made commitments at the 2022 election to finish the rebuild of Foster primary, as its main building is from 1965 and is pretty ordinary and needs updating.

And finally, there is the stadium at the Mirboo North primary and secondary schools, which is a shared stadium between the two schools and the community. Indeed I am in the process of organising some meetings with all the users of that, because it is a stadium that is out of date, it does not meet any of the standards anymore and the toilets and change rooms are pretty much disgusting, if I might say. I was pleased to have the Minister for Community Sport come and visit after the storm earlier in the year to understand the needs there, but we actually need the government to get on board, particularly the Department of Education, to fund the new stadium there. We do not oppose the bill, and I wish it safe passage through the house.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (11:47): Today I rise to contribute to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, which fundamentally is to enhance and to improve the regulation of schools and other educational institutions across our state, and I am pleased that the opposition are not opposing this bill.

I would also like to give an acknowledgement and a shout-out and send my condolences and best wishes to Auburn Primary School after the incident that occurred there yesterday. We wish them all well and send our condolences to the family that lost one of their young ones.

This bill introduces several reforms aimed at strengthening the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. By equipping the VRQA with the necessary authority we can better prevent unregistered or non-compliant schools from slipping through the cracks and ensure that every student receives a safe and high-quality education. The bill also reduces the administrative workload for school principals by allowing the principal to delegate some responsibility for work experience and structured workplace learning arrangements. This change will assist principals, who have an incredible workload not only dealing with the things at the school but also dealing with all the other issues that come in from outside the school through the parents, the families and other agencies that influence the education process. It will enable principals to focus more on leading their schools, while the staff with relevant expertise can manage some of that workload that the principals would have been carrying. It also reduces the burden, as the member for Kew mentioned earlier, that the principals carry on their shoulders. As I say, if we can reduce some of that pressure and workload on the principals, they can manage their schools much, much better.

In Melton we work very closely with our schools, as I assume most members in this chamber do. I visit schools out in my electorate on a regular basis. In fact last Friday, due to World Teachers Day, I was out at Binap Primary School, which is our newest primary school in Melton out in Brookfield. It was fantastic to catch up with some of the school captains and the assistant principal Chris Carpenter. It was fantastic. It is a great school and growing rapidly with numbers in a newish area and a developing area of Melton. We are building new schools every year in Melton, and since I have been the member for the last six years I think I have opened a new school each year, and there are two more to be built next year – a new public secondary school in Cobblebank and a new primary school at Weir Views, which will both be open for the 2026 school year, which is fantastic and catering for the massive growth in that area.

This Friday I am going out to St Francis Catholic College at their new campus at Cobblebank. We provided in excess of $5 million to that school to build stage 1 of their new campus, and it will be great

to go out there on Friday and assist with the official opening of that campus. We have a great relationship with not only our public schools but also our independent and Catholic schools in the Melton electorate.

Being so closely connected to your schools is clearly one of the best parts of the job of being a member of Parliament. I am grateful to all of the principals, the assistant principals, the teachers and the support staff, and also I want to extend a shout-out to the school councils for the amazing work that they do. We have some fantastic school communities, which include the school councils, the teachers, the parents and the families in total. They are amazing schools, and as I say, we have great working relationships with them.

I think most of our schools in Melton have had an upgrade. There might be one or two that are yet to happen, but most of them have been funded for an upgrade – these are the older schools, but again, as I said, we continue to build new schools in Melton and the surrounding area. I know my friend in the electorate of Kororoit has also had a number of schools built in her electorate because it is the fastest-growing area in the state, and we are trying to keep up with that growth.

Last week I visited Melton Secondary College. They did a production of *Chicago – Chicago: Teen Edition* – and it was fantastic. I thought I was going to see a movie, but actually it was a live production, so that is how I am really up with things. I rocked in there, and it was a live production, and all these kids were dressed up ready to go. It was terrific. It was in the Melton community hall, and it was a fantastic production. It was as good a live production as I have ever been to. I was really in awe of all the kids that were in this production. If you will allow me to do it, I think I will give them all a shout-out, so here we go. To Sarah, Carly and Joey, Adrian, Luke, Alice, Emily, Sinead, Justine, Kendal, the arts team, ELT, Isabel, Kayska, Sage, Rhys, Madison, Lily, Ekamneet, Akshnoor, Tiana, Irene, Milka, Izabella, Alexandra, Louise, Riley, Diing, Lee, Oliva, Ash, Eric Duran, Joy, Myah, Skyler, Lilly, Jordan, Antenah, Ryan, Eshann, Cima, Fizza, Josh, Alexis, Aurora, Dylan, Roxy and Velma, you all played a wonderful part. It was a great show, and I cannot wait to see the production that they will provide next year.

I will tell you what, there is a lot of talent out in Melton in these live productions, so it will be fantastic to see what they are going to do next year. I have offered to sponsor their show next year, so it will be terrific. I will recommend it next year when it is on. I will advertise it to everyone to come out and have a look, so well done – and also to the local businesses that supported that production, and the council of course in allowing it to go on in the local hall. It was terrific. Recently with the wrapping-up of the Melbourne Fringe Festival only a week or so ago and the growing arts scene, I am trying to get the Fringe Festival out to Melton next year. This production of *Chicago: Teen Edition* – we need more and more of these sorts of things to allow the kids to have an opportunity to express themselves in the way that they wish to. I think it was fantastic that they were able to do that, and it needs to continue through our schools. We need to support that even more.

Coming back to the bill and some of the specific changes, it will eliminate the show-cause process where a non-government school or boarding premises voluntarily cancels its registration or ceases its operations. It seeks to increase penalties for operating an unregistered school or school boarding premises to 120 penalty units for individuals and 600 for a corporate entity, and in aligning with similar legislation it will be a significant increase. It provides the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority with new powers to issue notices to produce documents or comply with regulatory requirements, ensuring greater accountability.

While we are talking about education, I just want to talk about what the Allan Labor government continues to do in regard to keeping Victoria the Education State, and it is the one of the most important investments that we can make in the future. We are building on the strong foundation we have already set with reforms and programs that benefit our students, our schools and our communities across the state.

I will just run through a few things that this government is providing, some of which have already been mentioned in earlier contributions. Phonics – we have embedded explicit teaching at the heart of Victorian education, including the use of systematic synthetic phonics. Mental health support – schools now have mental health practitioners and a dedicated Schools Mental Health Fund to support student wellbeing. Pathways to employment – our Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships program ensures students gain hands-on experience while still in school. Health care access – initiatives like doctors in secondary schools, Smile Squad dental vans and the NDIS navigator program provide crucial support to students. Of course there is the school saving bonus, with credits arriving in family accounts soon; the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund; affordable school uniforms; and free period products for all government schools. Programs like the breakfast club and Glasses for Kids ensure that no child is held back by hunger or a lack of essential resources, and of course we have expanded programs like out-of-hours school care, the student excellence program, primary mathematics and science specialists to enhance learning outcomes.

To further improve teacher capacity and student support we have reduced face-to-face teaching hours and added more school nurses and allied health services, and we have also launched the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership. With programs like the teacher excellence program we are actively supporting teachers and students working in regional Victoria, and of course with these reforms the Allan Labor government continues to invest in the future of every student. We are not just improving education; we are making sure every young person in Victoria has the opportunity to succeed. This is an important bill. As I say, the schools are fantastic in my electorate but also across the state, and I commend the bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (11:57): I will begin my contribution by also acknowledging the tragic accident outside Auburn South Primary School yesterday and paying my respects to the families of the affected children and the teachers and the school. They all have our sympathies; we hold them in our hearts. If I can be indulged a little more, I would like to pay tribute also to the tragic accident that happened in South-West Coast just last week, where a truck went through the bedroom of Carmel and Jimmy Madden, people I knew very well. I pay my respects to their family – they were amazing contributors to our community – particularly Gerald, his brother, and Sally and the whole family. My condolences.

I begin by speaking on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. The purpose of this bill is to improve the regulation of schools and other educational institutions across the state. Clearly we will not be opposing improvements to regulation. However, this is a bill that is not doing a lot to fix the education system itself. Whilst it is important that we have standards – and this bill makes sure that child safety standards are adhered to and makes other minor changes – it is very much an administrative bill. Whilst this is an administrative bill in the education space, we have an absolute education crisis going on in the state of Victoria. This discussion had the opportunity to really make some changes.

I am speaking constantly with the educators in our region, particularly the principals, and they really are their wits' end. Some of the activities in this bill are things like taking away some of the administrative burden on principals and sharing the load, ensuring that when children go on work experience and structured workplace learning placements, they can share the load with other leaders within the school to make sure those administrative burdens are shared. These are good things. I think anything that can be done to assist the principals in particular is good, because their job in running schools has very much changed. We have got a very different environment that is happening in our schools as we speak. I was speaking to a principal recently who told me he has not had one day's break since 3 December last year, because he spent the whole of the summer break – and he was not looking for sympathy; he is a very committed principal at one of our secondary schools, and I have a lot of them in my region – trying to find staff. That is a daily challenge.

Now we are seeing a teacher exodus because teachers are burning out. Teachers are not feeling backed in. I have spoken in this place already many times about the wonderful teachers who taught many of

my children and are now teaching grandchildren of mine and who are saying they just have not got control of the classroom. These are very experienced teachers. It is not because of their skill set; it is because we are not seeing an education system now that is really fit for purpose. We have got a cluttered curriculum. We have got teachers who are having to deal with psychology issues, and they are not trained psychologists. They are having to work out where to put their priorities with the curriculum when it is so cluttered. With the NAPLAN results we saw just last year that one-third of our students in Victoria are not meeting the reading and numeracy levels needed. That is 300,000 of our students not meeting the standard for reading and numeracy. It is absolutely appalling.

The government needs to recognise that the lockdowns have affected our children These are kids who are really struggling, and as I have said already in this place before, we have got children on restricted movement in the schools because of the abuse of children against each other. So instead of having to just, as a teacher, work out what the program is and whether they can fit maths and geography together, they are also having to keep students apart. The challenges are enormous, and the children really are struggling. We have got to do things differently, and so the recommendations that have come forward from experts are talking about having a look at a solid, sustainable approach to changing how we do things. The government needs to put significant effort and sustained attention on this problem, because these children are our future, and we cannot continue to push the teachers when they are saying it is not worth it.

One of the teachers said to me recently that it is not even a family-friendly profession anymore because so many people are working from home. The government is clearly allowing that, and we end up with a two-tiered system where so many people are working from home and the teachers are thinking, 'Well, I've got no-one to look after my children whilst I'm working because I can't get childcare, and I'm making so many sacrifices.' It is just not working for families. Even with the incentives the government gave to regional schools – I was talking to the schools in my region and they said it is not working because it puts a two-tiered approach into the schools. If someone has given 10, 15 years of their life to teaching within a school and someone comes in from out of the region and gets extra money, it creates an unfair and unequal environment. This government cannot manage money, but they also cannot use it as the only approach.

We have a real challenge in our schools. We have to back in teachers. Another teacher said to me that there is no appetite for suspension. Whilst we all understand and this teacher particularly commented about how we must make sure everyone has the right to a good education, we cannot ignore the fact that these environments now for some children are not suitable, and it is holding up the ability for others to flourish and for teachers to actually do their job effectively. That is not to say we do not need to find ways and systems that suit different individuals with different needs – we actually do – but we need to make sure we back in teachers and we put consequences and boundaries around activities or behaviours that are causing the system to go into collapse. It is pretty logical stuff, and it is not, I think, too frightening.

It should not be that teachers, like in a Warrnambool College situation recently, have to go to WorkCover to be able to get acknowledgement that they are struggling. I was shocked to hear that the department were instructing them to put up with it and be quiet – 'We don't want to cause any shame on the government.' Well, I am sorry, when you are the government, you have a job to do, and when something is breaking you need to address it and you need to get it back on track. Instead of ignoring the problem and having a teacher exodus, you need to actually find ways to listen to the experts in the field, and they are the teachers, they are the principals, they are the experienced individuals and they are also the new teachers, the freshly qualified teachers who are saying it is really not what they expected and are often leaving within the first five years. So we do need to address the problem.

School refusal is up enormously. A Portland school told me that they are spending a huge amount of time chasing students. They have to contact them – I think it was either daily or weekly – and that is taking an enormous amount of time away from the school being able to actually teach children, because someone is having to contact them.

These kids, some of them have not been at school for two years, but they are still the responsibility of the school. These are really challenging situations that 30 years ago did not exist. To still have the one teacher, sometimes an assistant, not always, in a classroom and the same sort of approach, we clearly have to do something differently, and this is the responsibility of the government. You cannot just throw $400 bonuses, for example, and only to the state school system, when we have clearly got, particularly in the regional areas, low socio-economic children who are going to Catholic schools and do deserve support as well. This inequitable approach that this government takes by using money in that way is totally inappropriate. We have got a department that is not listening. We have got the need for flexible options, which is not happening. We have got the opportunity as a state, through the Allan Labor government, who are in charge, to look at the system and actually fix it, not to carry on about being the Education State, not celebrating failure when they have NAPLAN results that say that a third of students are not meeting the numeracy and reading requirements. They should be acknowledging their failures, addressing the issue and ensuring that our youth, our future of the state of Victoria, are educated, because it is absolutely without a doubt that a good education provides for a good future. Victoria is being left behind because we had the longest lockdowns and our children are the most compromised. We can all talk about how tough this world is to live in as a young person, but without a solid education around them, without the support of adults within the education system being backed in themselves by government, we certainly have a bleak future and certainly not a Victoria that we can claim is the Education State anymore.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (12:07): I am delighted to be speaking on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, and Acting Speaker Addison, I am sure you are delighted to be listening to these contributions as a fine former teacher yourself. There are several of us in the chamber at the moment, and I will say hear, hear to the teachers out there, all of them. They do an extraordinary, extraordinary job every single day in educating the students of Victoria, as do our principals, and this bill actually does go to alleviating some of the administrative burden for principals, which I am very happy to be speaking about. But I cannot continue without addressing the fact that last Friday was World Teachers' Day, which is cause for celebration, but on a more sombre note I actually attended the funeral of a local very, very loved principal, Tom Daly, who I did speak about in my members statement yesterday. That funeral was filled with principals and teachers, former colleagues, amazing people who have made changes to everyone's life. The impact that a good teacher has on all of us – I am sure each and every member of this chamber can think of at least one if not many, many more teachers who left an indelible mark on them, who gave them a passion for a particular area of learning, who inspired them one way or another. Whenever I get an opportunity to speak on an education bill, I seize it with both hands because it is a moment to be able to acknowledge the fabulous work of our teachers and the tremendous efforts that principals put in each and every day.

This bill amends the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to strengthen the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Registration Qualification Authority, the VRQA, and it also amends the act which I alluded to before to lift some of the admin burden off principals, to reduce admin for them, for the authority, for other portfolio entities and regulated entities. It also will allow school principals to nominate another person or classes of person to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements. It is going to take some of that paperwork off their desk, because there are others who are well equipped to be able to do that. Enabling principals to be able to pass that on to someone else just frees them up and gives them a bit more time to deal with all the other matters that come with managing a school, because they are complex places, schools – they are not simple. They have got a whole cross-section of community who attend, and even the smaller schools will have complexities. They are in the business of educating people, and that takes skill, it takes knowledge, it takes talent and it takes a well-organised staff team as well as teachers.

Wherever we can alleviate some of that admin burden for principals is a day to celebrate, I say. I did note the member for Kew talked about Riverside Grammar before in her example. I was looking back at that because I recall when the Riverside Grammar article came out in the *Age* in 2022. I was a bit shocked by the status of this school, or pseudo-school, because it was not registered. I am delighted

that this bill will actually prevent situations like that from occurring again. It gives the VRQA increased powers, which is definitely something that we needed to see here, and it allows them to make sure that any entity which is a pseudo-school or could be considered to be a school can actually be investigated by them and addressed. And increasing penalties as well is very important in this regard. I will not drill into the minutia of those penalties because there are many other things that I would do want to speak about here.

This is an important bill. As I said before, anything that can make life easier for our principals is wonderful. I do note that the member for South-West Coast was fairly gloomy towards the end of her contribution when she came to discussing our Education State, and that is a real shame. I would like to change the tone here, because we have so much to celebrate. I have to say that to say that we are just all talk about the Education State is actually insulting. There is so much more than talk.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: It is factually correct. Thank you, Minister. I will take that interjection, because it is a great one. It is factually correct that we are the Education State. There is an extensive list of the things that we have done, and one of them is in terms of the teacher workforce. Because this has been discussed here today, I just want to mention a few things here. I do like putting facts on the record into *Hansard*. I think it is an obligation that we all have, to deal in facts. We are actually leading the country. Our workforce is increasing more than any other state or territory. It is a challenge – no-one is shying away from that – which is why we are tackling it and we are addressing it. One of the tangible things that we have done is create 8000 new scholarships for people to study secondary teaching. It has already led to a 9 per cent increase in university offers for this year.

Kathleen Matthews-Ward interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Hear, hear indeed. That is how we build a workforce. We have to train them first. We have put our money where our mouth is, and we have ensured that this is exactly what we are doing. People have seized the opportunity. They have gone, 'Well, there's a great career there, and if I can get a scholarship and learn to teach without having a HECS-debt sword of Damocles hanging over my head for the next two decades of my life, what a fabulous thing to do indeed.' So we are attracting people to the workforce, and that is marvellous. We actually spent $32.2 million in paid student-teacher placements.

I remember doing my student-teacher placement – and I am going to give the game away – in 2001. I had to take annual leave. I had to take unpaid leave.

A member interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Oh, thank you. There are those who are trying to flatter me and pretend that I am younger than I am. I was teaching people who – my colleagues now, I think I may have been teaching when they were mere infants. I will move on from there, but to be quite honest it was a real struggle. Acting Speaker Addison, I am sure you remember what it was like doing unpaid placements. It is a strain. There was a time when I thought, 'I don't know how I'm going to afford my rent because I'm not getting paid to do this. I've had to take unpaid leave. I've exhausted all my accrued leave from my work.' I was renting. I was living out of home, and I had to pay for food and all of that. The stress was pretty huge, but I pushed on. I made it through with good supportive people around me as well. But to be able to alleviate that is an incredible support for our future workforce. It also tells them how valued they are. Because we do value our teachers in this state – we do – and that is why we are the Education State.

I want to mention as well – here again, we have put our money where our mouths are – $95.7 million to expand support for early career and returning teachers. Once again we are making sure that we are funding support for them to come back into the classroom if they have left for whatever reason and

for those new teachers coming in, because there is a lot of work to be done when you first start teaching and you do need good support.

I see nodding heads around here from those who have been in that situation and understand what it is like.

We do not just talk the talk. This government gets out there and funds our schools. We get out there and we are funding teacher placements. We are supporting our workforce and our future workforce. I will not sit here and listen to claims made by those opposite which are baseless and have absolutely no substance to them.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: It is unfortunately unfactual, and that is why I do like to bring the facts in here, Minister. There are some other areas in which we have put in a great deal of funding, and I did hear the member for Melton's wonderful contribution. He listed several amazing initiatives.

A member interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: He is a fabulous member indeed.

I want to just touch on a few other things in terms of new schools and capital investment, because we need these buildings, we need good schools and we need schools upgraded as well. Our record speaks for itself. Since we came to government – it is nearly 10 years; it is going to be our decade coming up next month – we have invested $14.9 billion into capital investment. $14.9 billion – I will make sure my enunciation is correct; it is a B, not an M. 122 new schools have been funded, including 14 new schools opened this year, with a total capacity for 9000 more students, all in our growth suburbs. That is a cause to celebrate. There have been 89,000 additional places for Victorian students, and 50 per cent of the schools built across the whole nation – this entire country – in the past decade have been built right here in Victoria.

Steve Dimopoulos: Say that again.

Daniela DE MARTINO: Fifty per cent of the schools built in the nation of Australia have been built right here in Victoria in the past decade. How is that? Are we the Education State? Yes, we certainly are.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (12:17): I also rise to address the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. What a joy it is to do so following my colleagues the member for Kew, the member for Gippsland South and the member for South-West Coast, and I desperately look forward to the contributions from the members for Mildura, Shepparton, Morwell and Eildon. The Shadow Minister for Education, the member for Kew, has outlined that the opposition will not be opposing this bill. It is quite clear, and there are a number of sensible changes within this bill that we think are just that – sensible.

They include the ability for principals to delegate work experience arrangements. This bill will enable principals to nominate another person or group of people to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements. This is a sensible reform, and it should be agreed to. I cannot believe, frankly, that it has not been thought of earlier. Principals are overworked, and they should be paid better, they should be respected more and they should be valued more. This is a small step in the right direction, but is it enough? The fact they currently have to approve every work experience and structured workplace learning arrangement for students at their school is just a little bit silly, so we are pleased that that is being addressed in this bill.

But here is the thing: while allowing principals to delegate one small part of their job is a sensible measure, it barely scratches the sides, really. The burden placed on principals these days – they are not just educational leaders within their communities, they are HR managers, they are project managers,

they are psychologists, they are garbologists, they are a number of things. And all of this of course is taking away from their ability to effectively lead their school communities.

As of this week there are 2000 teacher vacancies in Victoria. This bill does not address that. In fact there are a number of things that this bill does not address. For example, in my community of Sandringham I have been in contact with the Minister for Education and the Minister for Public and Active Transport for a number of months now, going back to mid-October or thereabouts in 2023, about the overcrowding problems on the 825 bus route.

This was first raised with me by students at Beaumaris Secondary College – some outstanding students, actually, and some exemplary students who of their own initiative sought to raise these matters with me. Oskar Edwardes – I will declare a conflict – is not just a student at Beaumaris Secondary College, and I am sure he is okay with me using his name on the basis that he has penned correspondence to the minister about this himself, but his father taught me at St Bede's all those years ago. His son Oskar is now a student at Beaumaris Secondary College, and he is leading this charge and doing so in fine, fine form.

This overcrowding problem on the 825 bus route is an issue. It is an issue. On 30 October 2023 the school wrote to the education minister at the time:

> There have been numerous negative impacts –

so wrote the principal –

> on students as a result of the overcrowding:
>
> - Accessibility issues
> - Safety issues
> - Antisocial behaviour
> - Work productivity impacted
>
> One student –

the letter goes on, and I am happy to provide this to Hansard as well –

> Amelia P –

who was then in year 11 –

> … shared her difficulty in accessing the bus due to the pushing and shoving. She mentioned that walking home is not a viable option for her, especially after knee surgery, and it significantly impacts her study time and ability to complete homework.
>
> Sofia F –

then a year 11 student –

> … had a negative experience with the overcrowding, stating that people are practically "lying on each other due to lack of space." This creates an unsafe environment and has forced her to walk further to access alternative transportation options. Similarly, Anika P highlighted the struggles she faces in getting to work on time, often having to wait for the next bus due to overcrowding, leading to lateness and professional consequences.

The letter goes on, but I am happy to make that available to Hansard.

I got a couple of responses from the government, from the Minister for Education and the minister for transport, on this. But frankly, the responses are not acceptable, because they do not seek to solve the problem. What they seek to do is justify the circumstance, and the kids see through this. I might say, this does not just impact on Beaumaris Secondary College; it impacts on Mentone Girls' Secondary College and it impacts on Sandringham College and other schools in the area that rely upon this 825 bus. Minister Williams, on this occasion, wrote in May 2024, effectively denying that there was an issue in the first place. The minister wrote:

> Student demand is particularly high in the afternoon due to multiple schools finishing at similar times –

it is hardly insightful; it is just a matter of fact –

> placing pressure on a small number of trips. As there is generally only one bus that is particularly busy, it is not feasible to provide another bus as there is insufficient demand outside the school peak.
>
> With services every 20 minutes, students are encouraged to consider minor adjustments to travel times to improve their travel experience.

That is all very good, but it does not actually solve the problem. There is still overcrowding on this bus. It goes on to suggest:

> Students who live within one kilometre of school are generally no more than a 15-minute walk to school, and cycling within three kilometres of school can usually mean travel to school can be achieved within 10 minutes cycling.

All very good, Minister, but it does not solve the problem of the overcrowded bus. We wrote again to the minister, who then replied on 24 September 2024. We did not just write to the minister and complain further, we were actually offering solutions and offering alternatives, and we suggested, through my consultation with Oskar and his confrères at Beaumaris Secondary College, an articulated bus. I did not know what an articulated bus was until Oskar told me. It is one of the big ones.

Paul Edbrooke: A bendy bus!

Brad ROWSWELL: It is a bendy bus. That is right, member for Frankston. You just got yourself in *Hansard* with that interjection. Well done. It shows how thoughtful you are – 'the bendy bus'. But I did not know what it was. It is called an articulated bus. We went to the minister with a solution, an articulated bus solution, but the operator has confirmed, according to the minister, that they do not have any of these vehicles available for deployment on this route. Further, it is worth noting that despite being capable of carrying more passengers, these vehicles face several challenges – their size and limited manoeuvrability et cetera.

So that is all very well and good, but here is the thing: the problem still remains. The overcrowding on the bus still remains. What I am trying to do together with students in my community is provide an alternative that the government could consider to fix the problem. What the government is doing at every twist and every turn is effectively telling us why whatever we are suggesting cannot work. I desperately plead with the government: please – we are trying, we are giving it a crack, we are offering solutions and you are knocking them over – come up with a solution yourselves to present to the kids. Oscar wrote to Minister Carroll on 19 July saying:

> I am writing to you regarding a matter of student safety.

It is true; it is a matter of student safety.

> Over the past year, the student communities of Beaumaris Secondary College, Sandringham College & Mentone Girls Secondary College have been advocating for changes to the 825 bus service. The core concern over this route is student safety stemming from overcrowding and high demand for this service.

I reckon the best thing that the education minister and in fact the transport minister could do is pop on down and jump on the bus, experience the overcrowding with the kids and know just how darn uncomfortable it is. They are doing their best, and I am working with them to advocate for them and to try and help them. All we are getting is block after block after block by the education minister and the transport minister, and it is not really good enough. We must do better by these kids.

As I said at the start of this contribution, we will not be opposing this bill. We think that there are some decent measures in it that do support teachers and education leaders in our school communities across the state. We do think that education standards are important, must be maintained and must be improved, and as I said, we will not be opposing this bill.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:27): In following the member for Sandringham – he might not welcome the comparison, I suspect – I have not heard a conservative politician so animated about buses since Boris Johnson. With that aside, it is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Education and

Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, which at its core is a set of I think simple, common-sense measures that are all about making sure students are getting the best education in a safe and supportive environment while also streamlining and simplifying the burden that is placed upon principals.

In opening my remarks I want to also acknowledge the tragedy that occurred yesterday at Auburn South Primary School. I was very moved by the leadership of the principal of that school Marcus Wicher. His leadership, his empathy for the families and his presentation to the media exemplified the array of burdens that are placed upon the shoulders of a principal at any school across Victoria at any time. In recognising that tragedy and the burden that that principal is carrying to support his school community in this very challenging time, I think it is a really important step that this bill is taking to alleviate some of that burden by enabling principals to delegate work experience and structured work-integrated learning arrangements and so forth.

Of course the bill also I think strengthens the capacity of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, the Victorian regulator of many registered training organisations that operate in Victoria and also our schools. It is important that the VRQA enjoys the confidence of the public and that it has the capacity to properly regulate schools and ensure that we do not have unregistered schools, because of the extraordinary risk that that creates for students, because we cannot be certain of the quality of provision and instruction and the safety of students who are in those schools. I am reminded of some of the difficulties that the VRQA experienced about a decade ago – not coincidentally when those opposite were last in government – when we saw partly as a consequence of the Howard government's attempts to inject so-called contestability into the vocational education and training market a huge detriment not only to our TAFE system but to the quality and reputation of vocational education and training more broadly, leading in very short order to a huge influx of private dodgy providers into the VET sector.

In a sense the VRQA was caught napping; it was overwhelmed by the number of dodgy providers which came into the sector during that 2010 to 2014 period.

A lot of the work that was undertaken by this government in its first term was really cleaning up that mess – cleaning up the mess that was inflicted upon the training sector, which it is still recovering from. Our work to safeguard TAFE, to ensure that we have a robust training regime, is all part of that, but there is an enduring lack of trust and confidence, sadly, across the community in TAFE and training. That is an incredibly damaging thing for our economy and for our society when we are talking about things like parity of esteem between the higher education and the tertiary sectors, where we want to encourage children to pursue whatever pathway is best for them and to recognise that there are really valuable jobs in our trades, when there is a massive trade shortage. Yet we cannot get enough young people going into TAFE and into VET programs to fill those shortages, and a lot of that stems from a regulatory failure 10 years ago that we are still grappling with today.

There is also the school sector that the VRQA has responsibility for, those minimum standards for school registration, and we have heard from previous speakers about some of the very damaging examples where there have been schools operating in an unregistered manner. So it is important that this bill does get to grips with and enables the VRQA to get to grips with unregistered providers and also to share information with other regulators.

I want to revert back to the dimension of the bill that addresses principals' capacity to now delegate approval for work experience. This is such an important part of a student's experience at school. I am looking forward in the coming weeks and months to having students who are interested in public policy and government coming to work in my office. Who knows where that might take them? But across the board, young people who have the opportunity to undertake work experience are exposed to, in a sense, the real world and to the application of things that they might be interested in at school level in the economy.

The member for Gippsland South talked about his experience, which may not have been the best one, but it perhaps also crystallised for him that the media was an option that he wished to pursue. That is replicated across Victoria in every school. But because it is replicated across Victoria in every school, the current arrangements create an unnecessary burden for principals that is easily avoided if those who really have the confidence and the authority within schools, whether they are careers managers, heads of year level or classroom teachers – those who know the students themselves and who are capable of signing off on a placement – are given the power to alleviate some of the unnecessary burdens placed upon principals. And that is so important, because both having been a teacher and now in the very regular visits I make to the fantastic schools across my community, I am constantly struck by the incredible weight of responsibility that principals carry and the impact that their leadership has for establishing a positive learning culture, which is in a sense the key thing for translating into student achievement.

So much is asked of principals. So much is placed upon their shoulders. Their actions are so powerful in shaping a school's culture. The more that we can support them to do that important work, the more that we can alleviate unnecessary burden, the better. So it is incredibly important that this bill does that.

In dwelling upon that point, I just want to acknowledge all of the principals who I work with very closely, seeing firsthand the deep care and empathy they have for their students, the support they provide to their staff and the unrelenting commitment they have to the holistic development of their students, not just in an academic sense but in a personal sense. And they are grappling with phenomena that I do not think were even present when I was in a classroom, and that was not too long ago. Acting Speaker Addison, I know you too have been in schools pretty recently, but I think the pace of change as a consequence of things like social media, of just the really dynamic and evolving nature of society – schools are at the frontline of those changes and principals are grappling with those as best they can, but it is also why this government has been so assiduous in supporting the work of principals through so many of the Education State initiatives.

I do want to come back to some of the contributions of the member for South-West Coast, who bemoaned the lack of action, and I have got to say, in the context of these debates, when we hear from those opposite about what they would do if they were in government, well, the simple fact is they were in government for four years, and what happened in that time was in effect nothing in the context of education.

You can have as many Institute of Public Affairs or IPA-initiated column inches as you like talking about regressive things like school vouchers, but what in effect did they do to improve the student experience, to target that nexus of teachers and students in the classroom, which is the single biggest determinant of whether or not a child is going to achieve to their potential? The short answer is nothing. I was in schools as a teacher between 2010 and 2014, and what I was struck by was the overwhelming lack of support for principals from a regional or central level. No new schools were built. There was a lack of investment going into the capital infrastructure of our education system – and the fabric of buildings is not everything, but it does matter.

Can I ask the member for South-West Coast: which government delivered the $4.4 million upgrade of Brauer College? Which government delivered $2.4 million for St Joseph's, Warrnambool? Which government delivered the $2 million upgrade for Hawkesdale P–12 College? Which government delivered the $2 million for Portland college?

Tim Bull: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): The member's time has expired.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (12:37): I rise to make a contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. Before I proceed, I wish to acknowledge the tragic event that happened at Auburn South Primary School yesterday. My thoughts and prayers are with the family who have lost their son, the other injured students and their families, the whole school community and also the first responders. It truly is a tragic event.

The bill before the house is for an act to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 in relation to regulatory and enforcement matters and for other purposes. In doing so, the bill amends the principal act to strengthen the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. Under the bill the VRQA will have the power to issue a notice to produce a document or information that the VRQA reasonably believes is necessary to determine whether a person or body is engaging in conduct in respect of which they are required to be regulated by the VRQA. In addition, the VRQA will have the power to issue a notice to comply to a person or body that the VRQA has reasonable cause to believe is required to be regulated by the VRQA under the act, requiring the person or body to either apply for registration or approval under the act or cease engaging in the relevant conduct.

Under current frameworks the VRQA has insufficient compliance and enforcement powers to determine whether a person or body is carrying on or conducting a school or a school boarding premises that is required to be registered. Without an appropriate regulatory means, the VRQA is a powerless and ineffective enforcement body. But as clause 51 of the bill amends section 5.8.10 of the principal act, the VRQA will now have the ability to adequately deter providers, including schools and school boarding premises, that it has reasonable cause to believe are required to be regulated from operating without registration or approval.

The bill also increases maximum penalties for unregistered schools and school boarding premises. Currently it is an offence to carry on or conduct a school or school boarding premises unless the VRQA has registered the school or school boarding premises under the act. But as a state we should not tolerate organisations touting themselves as schools if they fail to meet the fundamental criteria for the definition of a school. Parents can generally have confidence that any school that they send their child to in this state, whether it be government or independent, will meet the basic safety and educative standards.

Allowing unregistered schools to persist could undermine public confidence in the education system as well as put already vulnerable youth in an unsupervised and unregulated environment. The only enforcement power within the legislation that the VRQA possesses is prosecution for a relevant offence and the imposition of a penalty following a successful prosecution. However, the maximum penalty at the moment is not enough, as identified by the VRQA. It is only 10 penalty units, $1975. This does not provide adequate deterrence, and there is little value in prosecuting these entities for such a small maximum penalty. Instead, in addressing this, the bill will increase the maximum penalties to 120 penalty points, $23,710, for individuals and 600 penalty units, $118,554, for a body corporate. This is a significant increase in the penalties for the offence of carrying on an unregistered school or boarding premises, but also these penalties are in line with others for such offences under the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the Children's Services Act 1996.

As per VRQA's website, in Victoria as of 30 June 2023 there were a total of 2310 registered schools, along with 38 registered school boarding premises. Of the registered schools, 68 per cent are government schools, 22 per cent are Catholic schools and 10 per cent are independent schools. I will also note that the bill will allow the VRQA to consider whether an applicant for registration or re-registration is a registered training organisation or if a high managerial agent of the applicant has ever failed to comply with the child safe standards, regardless of whether the VRQA is the integrated sector regulator for the applicant.

Another amendment the bill makes to the principal act is allowing a principal of a school to nominate another person or class of persons to make work experience and structured workplace learning

arrangements for students in accordance with a ministerial order. Currently school principals do not have this ability, and they are instead required to approve every work experience and structured workplace learning arrangement for students at their school. As a result, this is a large administrative burden for principals, particularly in large schools and schools where a majority of students undertake work experience or structured workplace learning. By allowing school principals to nominate others to make these arrangements, the bill will provide schools and principals with the freedom to approve these arrangements in a way that is appropriate to their school's individual circumstances. This is a sensible reform measure and much-needed legislative amendment, as we all know in this place the enormous workload of school principals and the role they play in our schools across the state. The last thing school principals want to be burdened with is time-consuming, excessive paperwork, and having to sign off every work experience or structured workplace learning arrangement for their students must be a huge task. I am sure this will be a welcome change and will empower the school staff, who are likely to know best what arrangements will work for each individual student.

The bill also makes some amendments as to how members of a Disciplinary Appeals Board pool and members of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority resign from their positions. Currently, under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 for any member of a Disciplinary Appeals Board pool or member of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority to resign from office, they must resign in writing to the Governor in Council. However, under the bill, if members wish to resign from office, they will now do so in writing to the minister. Amongst other things, this amendment will speed up the process of standardising resignation requirements with other boards across the state within legislation.

This bill highlights the need to support the education system, but it is clear that there is so much more that needs to be done. In my electorate the state government merged our only four public high schools into one school, Greater Shepparton Secondary College, leaving no choice for students and families in the public system. The school has faced significant challenges, and numbers are declining with parents looking for or turning to other alternatives. At the time, the government expected enrolments to be over 3000 on the one school site. As you can imagine, putting so many students from all of the former public schools together has been a significant challenge for the teachers, staff, students and their families. In 2020 there were 2269 students enrolled, and that figure has dropped down to currently just over 2000.

But as I mentioned, there is no other option in the public system, and many families simply do not have a choice due to financial constraints. Many families have left the region. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work for every student, and it certainly is not working at this school. I know a family that wanted to move back to Shepparton to be close to their family, but their year 8 daughter, who has some anxiety issues, would not cope with the size and model of this school. So they moved to Benalla, still 45 minutes away from the family. The Greater Shepperton region has a population of almost 70,000 yet only one option for a public high school. I am doing all I can to support the school for students and families. We all want it to work. We know that we do have many issues within the education system more broadly, which are not only impacting on the Greater Shepparton Secondary College.

I wish to acknowledge the amazing teachers that are doing everything possible that they can. My daughter is actually a teacher at one of the local schools.

My daughter loves her job and she wants to stay in the system, but we know that there are significant challenges with teacher shortages and teacher burnout. As we move forward into the future there has to be some significant change to ensure that our teaching staff are supported, that families are supported and that we provide the very best education that we can to our students, and provide their families with choice – as I mentioned, that is something that is not happening in my region when it comes to public secondary schools. We are not seeing enough teachers enrolling and we are not retaining enough teachers, and I do feel we just simply need to do better.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (12:45): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. Before I begin, can I pass on my condolences to Auburn South Primary School after the tragic incident that occurred yesterday. I know everyone in this place, as would every Victorian, will be thinking of those families at this really sad time.

The bill amends the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to strengthen the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, the VRQA. The bill also amends the act to allow school principals to nominate other persons or classes of persons to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements, to streamline and standardise processes relating to board appointments to education portfolio entities and skills and TAFE portfolio entities and to reduce the administrative burden for the authority, other portfolio entities, regulated entities and school principals.

Victoria really is the Education State. I know in my electorate we have had an unprecedented amount of funding into our schools. We have had complete rebuilds, we have had upgrades to every school in my electorate and many across the Geelong region, and I know our communities are really excited about that and excited about the new schools that are on the radar. This government has supported education from the very first day we started in 2014 after being elected. Education is the most important public investment we can make in our future, and we know that. We also know that it is one of the ways of addressing poverty in our communities. We know the importance of a good strong education, which leads to employment and addresses the issues around poverty. I do want to give our teachers, staff and principals at all the schools across Victoria a real shout-out, because the work they do is extraordinary. Sometimes they get a bit of a caning from parents and different lobby groups, but from my experience with teachers – particularly in my electorate, where I regularly visit all my schools – the work they do is extraordinary. They are there because they are committed to teaching those young people. They are not there for the money; they are not there for any other reason but their commitment to education and to ensuring that young people get the education that they deserve.

As I mentioned, we have rebuilt and redeveloped all of our schools in the Geelong region, but we have also established in Geelong the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, including the teaching excellence program. That has been a really important one in my community and right across the Barwon south-west region. Teachers were very excited about that opportunity. It was opened I think two years ago now, and the feedback I have from teachers is outstanding; they see that as a great opportunity for them.

We also incorporated the Geelong Tech School into our Gordon TAFE, again providing significant education opportunities for young people in the Geelong region. Not every school can have the high-tech facilities that they would all love, but by having the tech school provided in that one location at the Gordon TAFE, every school comes in and has that education opportunity in the latest technology in a whole range of areas. So that has been an excellent opportunity for our young people in Geelong, but not just in Geelong; I know there are many others across the state.

I think introducing phonics, updating the Victorian teaching and learning model to embed explicit teaching at its core, including the use of systematic synthetic phonics – that is a mouthful – will be a game changer for our students and for our teachers in Victoria. I am looking forward to seeing the outcomes once that starts to roll out. But I think looking after our students and our teachers to a large degree by having mental health practitioners and the Schools Mental Health Fund incorporated into our schools, the Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships, the Doctors in Secondary Schools, the NDIS Navigator program – all these make such a difference to students in our schools.

We have also supported disadvantaged students through the school saving bonus, with credits to hit family accounts in the next month, which is another really important part. We want students to be turning up to school, and with all these supports in place we are seeing those children taking up those opportunities. When I visit my schools – and there are 21 schools in my electorate – they are all reporting how amazing those facilities are for the young people, supporting them to be able to attend

camps and sports by having that excursion fund. The affordable school uniforms program is another big one for many families in my electorate. With the free period products in all government schools, when I go to the schools the young girls there tell me how amazing that is, because there is a huge cost factor – there is – and it makes such a difference for them. Also, the breakfast club program delivering free school breakfasts – we know how important that is with the cost-of-living challenges that many of our families are facing at the moment – is just another thing that takes pressure off those families. Glasses for Kids is another fantastic program. I know that many schools in my electorate were able to participate in that program, along with the Smile Squad, having our kids' teeth checked. I know that for many families that is one of the things that they cannot afford to do, so to have that in our schools is fantastic.

Out-of-hours school care, the student excellence program and primary mathematics and science specialists are all really important additions in our schools, as well as reduced face-to-face teaching hours for our teachers, the active schools program and additional school nurses and allied health services. When I talk to young people in secondary school, they love that; they love the idea that they can see someone and discuss what might be a medical thing or a mental health thing. But they have those opportunities there within the school, which they really appreciate. There is support for tertiary teaching students and teachers to work in regional Victoria – we know of the skills shortages. Particularly for the more rural communities it has been challenging, so this government has put programs in place to ensure that we can get those teachers in there.

Of course introducing three- and four-year-old kinder to our children, making them ready for school life, is another important program that we have put in place. It does make a difference. It makes a difference I know to my community and I am sure to Victorians right across the state, and we know how important education is and the need to ensure that we are providing those much-needed services not just in some areas but right across Victoria. I see the benefits of that in the schools that I go into. They are very positive about what we are delivering for students in the Geelong region.

I continually hear about how wonderful certain programs are and what we are doing and the support that we are offering students, so it is important that we continue to remind ourselves that what we are doing is building the Education State.

This bill is an important one. There are a number of factors to it, but I think overall it is important for us to continue to provide the supports within the education system and within our schools and to support our teachers, the staff in the schools and principals to ensure that we are providing the best education for our students. I commend the bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (12:55): Along with a lot of members in this place that have risen to speak on this bill today I too would like to send my condolences to the Auburn South Primary School on the tragic incident that occurred yesterday. As the mother of an almost-10-year-old, it is just tragic, and I was certainly emotional whilst reading about it in the news. So I am making sure I take some time to send my condolences to Auburn South Primary School.

We are not opposed to this bill, and it does take some steps in the right direction towards helping our teachers, in particular principals – and I have been doing a lot of work with principals in my region recently, particularly around Robinvale College and the issue they have had finding a permanent principal. I think we are on our second or third now, and unfortunately the last was one of those teachers that has left the profession. According to the most recent teacher supply and demand report there was a 48 per cent increase in the rate of both primary and secondary school teachers leaving the profession between 2021 and 2022. That is staggering. It is the teachers, but yes, it is also principals.

A couple of weeks ago I attended the St Paul's Mildura 50th anniversary. My cousin Vince Muscatello is the principal and has been for, gosh, a long, long time. He told me that he is also leaving the profession. He will not be back. Vince has done incredible work at that school, and on the day that they had lots of people and former students come back, he just felt that – he has been on extended

leave, and after much soul-searching has decided that he can no longer serve our young people in his role as principal, so he is leaving the sector entirely, which is just staggering. If someone like Vince – he is a nonno; he is not a young man to be changing careers, but that is exactly what he is doing – is doing that, that is a reason why there are 2000 teaching vacancies in Victoria right now, which is just staggering, particularly in the regions where CRTs are not always easy to come by. We have a small pool of teachers; it is hard to attract teachers.

We have got some Department of Education housing in Robinvale that Swan Hill Rural City Council have been lobbying the department and the government to actually redevelop to help out with the housing shortage. There are these huge, old blocks with huge, old houses with one person living in them, and we are getting very little traction in that space – whereas the community knows, the teachers know, the council knows, if they were to be demolished, you could build one- and two-bedroom units on these 1-acre blocks and open it up to healthcare workers and to other support staff as well, if that was a possibility. So there needs to be some flexibility there.

Also, before we tick over to lunch, I did want to send a shout-out to Donald Primary School which will be visiting the Parliament this afternoon. We had Charlton primary school here last sitting week, and they were thrilled with their tour and thought it was fantastic. So it is great to see more future leaders from Donald Primary School come to Parliament House this sitting week.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Members

Minister for Employment

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today and tomorrow the Minister for Jobs and Industry will answer questions for the portfolios of employment and prevention of family violence.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Government performance

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. According to IBAC's recent perceptions-of-corruption survey, 30 per cent of Victorian public servants agree that corruption is a problem in the Victorian government, double the figure of 2016. Why does the Premier preside over an increasingly corrupt government?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I resoundingly reject the claim – the false, baseless, untrustworthy claim – that has been put forward by an untrustworthy, disgraced Leader of the Opposition. And it is not just me who says this about the Leader of the Opposition.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The Premier rejected the claim at the outset. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Indeed I am answering the question directly. The question was put to me, and I am absolutely entitled to reject the false, baseless, untrustworthy claims made by a fraudster, an untrustworthy Leader of the Opposition. Again, it is not me who says this.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I do not stand on my feet for no reason. I ask members to come to order.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier's nasty imputations are a breach of standing order 118.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order, and quite frankly we are all sick of the sexist tropes from the member for Brighton when it comes to his references to the Premier.

The SPEAKER: If there are offensive words made in the chamber directed at a member, that member can ask for a withdrawal. A withdrawal has not been requested.

James Newbury: Speaker, I raised standing order 118, and that has not been dealt with.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to be very careful about imputations on members of Parliament.

Jacinta ALLAN: I would just remind the house that it is not this side of government that has been in court testifying against the Leader of the Opposition. His own colleagues find the Leader of the Opposition deeply untrustworthy.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Nepean is warned. The member for Eureka is warned.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier can come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about the public service. Over the 25 years I have worked with Victorian public servants, I have found those public servants to be overwhelmingly of good character – good people who deliver good services for our community. I will not have –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is addressing a question I did not ask. This is about what public servants think of her corrupt government.

Jacinta ALLAN: On the point of order, Speaker, I was asked about the Victorian public service. I will not have the Leader of the Opposition trash the Victorian public service, who deliver good services for our community.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is not a very good start to question time. Members will be removed without warning. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I say this in the context of being proud to have worked with many public servants. There was a time when a Premier sacked the Auditor-General because he did not like the advice that that Auditor-General was giving to his government of the day – the same former Premier who is bankrolling the Leader of the Opposition's court case.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House is warned, and I was not going to warn members.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, I ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question around the perceptions of corruption by IBAC in this state and ask the Premier not to criticise an independent body of the Parliament like she is.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier was very clear at the outset that she rejects the premise of the question. It is hard for anyone in this place to hear the Premier's answer because of the constant interruptions from those on the other side of the house.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As the Speaker has indicated, I was being relevant to the question, because I rejected at the outset the premise of the question and I am telling the Leader of the Opposition why. As I said, I am proud to work with a strong public service, unlike some who, when they were perhaps the Deputy Premier, interfered with the office of the Chief Commissioner of Police that resulted in an Ombudsman's investigation into the former Minister for Water. We all remember the office of living it up, the bottles of Perrier in the office of living it up.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: You think it is a joke.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, for the fourth time I ask you to draw the Premier back to the question.

The SPEAKER: I think the Premier answered the question at the outset.

Jacinta ALLAN: There is plenty more evidence. The former Minister for Planning – well, wasn't that a saga that goes on and on and on?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier can answer the question as she chooses. She answered the question at the outset.

Jacinta ALLAN: These may be inconvenient truths and facts.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, you do have the power to direct the Premier not to attack the opposition. The Premier is desperately trying to deflect, but can the Premier be drawn back to the question?

Jacinta ALLAN: On the point of order, Speaker, to be clear, I was asked a question about perceptions of integrity in government. I was providing the Leader of the Opposition with examples of a failure of integrity from his former Liberal–National colleagues when they were in government.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Speaker, page 155, *Rulings from the Chair*, rulings from Speakers Coghill, Delzoppo, Maddigan and Brooks all found that attacks on the opposition are inappropriate.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, again *Rulings from the Chair*, page 155, 'Discussion of former government permitted':

> … it is permissible to talk about something that the former government did.

Speaker Smith.

The SPEAKER: On the point of order, the Premier was not attacking the current opposition. The Premier answered the question at the outset, and the Premier can answer as the Premier wishes now.

Jacinta ALLAN: I reiterate that I am proud to work with a strong public sector where we do not sack independent officers because we do not agree with them. We do not do dodgy planning decisions to feather our own nests. We certainly –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: And I think the behaviour of the opposition leader speaks for itself and his own personal integrity.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): The Premier once said that it is critical that all Victorians:

> … have confidence that public officials … conduct themselves, and use public funds, with the highest degree of integrity and accountability.

Since then the Premier has (1) enabled CFMEU misconduct on taxpayer-funded worksites, (2) repeatedly failed to appear in front of parliamentary committees and (3) presided over an increasingly corrupt government. How can any Victorian believe that the Premier has the highest degree of integrity and accountability?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): Again I resoundingly reject the baseless, false allegation put by a baseless fraudster of a Leader of the Opposition. This is baseless at its worst, and as we are seeing, these baseless claims once again demonstrate that you cannot trust a single thing that the Leader of the Opposition says. You cannot trust a single thing the Leader of the Opposition says. And it is not me who makes these claims. The member for Rowville had a bit to say about being double-crossed by the Leader of the Opposition.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question went to the Premier's own comments.

The SPEAKER: The Premier answered the question at the outset.

Jacinta ALLAN: There have been a lot of comments made about the complete lack of trustworthiness and integrity of the Leader of the Opposition by his own colleagues. I reiterate: I am proud to work with a strong public service here in Victoria.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier answered the question at the outset. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:15): On this side of the house we know that more homes means more opportunities. That is the reason why we are delivering the Suburban Rail Loop, Australia's largest housing project. Melbourne and Victoria continue to grow. Melbourne is going to have a population the size of London by the 2050s, and that means a stronger economy, a more vibrant community and more opportunities. It means we need thousands more homes in the places people want to live and near the things that they need and the people that they love, and the Suburban Rail Loop is going to deliver just that. It means new housing built on the doorstep of world-class, quality educational precincts. It is going to mean housing close to local jobs, services and open spaces nearby. It is going to deliver a massive 70,000 homes in the first stage alone, and as our population continues to grow, more Victorians will have the ability to expand their families.

The Allan Labor government is building for the future and setting Victoria up for the next generation, while those opposite bury their heads in the sand. We want to create more opportunities for young people and we want to put more millennials into homes so that our kids and our grandkids know that owning a home is within their grasp. The Suburban Rail Loop is going to completely change Melbourne forever. It is going to change how we move, how we work, how we live and the communities that we live in. Those who want to block the project are blocking the homes. They would rather do nothing. They would rather simply take the easy way out. But we are not blockers. I want to be clear on this: we are not blockers, we are builders. We are delivering this project to deliver more homes because we simply cannot afford not to do this. We are going to take 600,000 cars a day off Melbourne roads when we build this project. We are going to make sure that we build better homes, better communities and better access to transport and more opportunities. That is what Victorians have elected us to do, and that is what we will deliver.

Economic policy

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): My question is to the Premier. Treasurer's advances, better known as the Treasurer's credit card, have ballooned from $365 million

a decade ago to at least $12.1 billion this financial year. Why is the Premier so afraid of telling Victorians how their tax dollars are spent?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): Again I reject a baseless claim made by the untrustworthy Leader of the Opposition. They are false claims, and I say that because we publish the budget and we publish regularly throughout the course of the year budget updates in terms of how funds are expended in this state. I will also, though, address directly the claim of credit card usage. I remember a time when a government was using credit cards. There were a government and a Premier, who is now bankrolling someone's court case over there, who were using government credit cards for a whole lot of personal purposes.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lara can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Lara withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, if standing order 58 has any substance, the Premier cannot simply sledge the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was not referring to the current opposition.

Jacinta ALLAN: In endeavouring to comply with standing orders and for answers to be factual – I know the Manager of Opposition Business is so keen for answers to be factual – I do just want to fact-check. I was sure that former Premier Kennett was supporting someone's court case. I was sure of that. I am delighted to be told that that is not true.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, how is this anything other than a nasty sledge?

The SPEAKER: The Premier already answered the question at the outset.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business continues to interrupt this place to sledge the Premier, again using sexist, gendered language, and I ask you to ask him to show respect to the Premier.

The SPEAKER: Members will be respectful to each other in the chamber. So far I am not seeing much of that today.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, I am seeking to understand your ruling. Is it now the contention that a Premier or minister can answer in one word and then spend 3 minutes simply sledging the opposition?

The SPEAKER: The Premier was not referring to the current opposition. The Premier was referring to previous governments and leaders. The Premier already answered the question at the outset. Manager of Opposition Business, if you wish to raise this as a question of my rulings –

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, there are 35 years of rulings, and in no ruling over that time am I aware that the word 'current' has been attached to a ruling – that an attack must be only on a current opposition. I am seeking your guidance as to whether that is a new ruling.

The SPEAKER: If you wish to have guidance on my rulings, Manager of Opposition Business, this is not the time. You can come and see me in my office after.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, again I refer to standing order 58. It does require that answers to questions be direct, factual and succinct, and indeed the Premier has been

factual when it comes to talking about the previous Premier of this state, the Liberal Jeff Kennett, and now the current, it would seem, real leader of the Liberal Party here in Victoria.

The SPEAKER: I have ruled on this. The Premier answered the question at the outset. Premier, I ask you to be very cautious about your attacks on former members of Parliament. It is not against the rules of the house, but it is a little disrespectful.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has made numerous references to a current court case. You have previously ruled that any matter that is sub judice should not be referred to in this place. The matter is still before the courts, and the sub judice rule should be applied.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to be mindful of the sub judice rules.

Jacinta ALLAN: In returning to answering the question, I do not need to make any implied reflection on the opposition. They appear to be doing it all on their own. They most certainly do not need my assistance. The question I was asked earlier I have already addressed, but I will repeat it, because it was a little while ago now, for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition: we do report on the expenditure of the state's finances regularly and transparently through the budget paper processes. In reference to the use of a Treasurer's advance, to describe that as being a credit card is wrong, false and baseless. As I have mentioned, it was a previous Labor government that had to get rid of the use of government credit cards that were being used by certain premiers of the day for their own use. We got rid of that practice. What we will continue to do is report on the budget finances in the usual way.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:25): Treasurer's advances are meant to be used for urgent and unforeseen expenditure. In 2022–23 a Treasurer's advance of $325 million was used to pay the interest on Victoria's debt. Given Victoria's debt level, how can this interest bill be seen as unforeseen?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): In terms of the use of a Treasurer's advance in the 2022–23 calendar year, I recall well a major flooding event in 2022–23 that did require the expenditure of a Treasurer's advance to support communities like Rochester – flood-affected communities right across large parts particularly of northern Victoria. If I remember rightly from the minister for roads, 63 out of the 79 local government areas were flood affected during the October 2022 floods. From time to time there are unforeseen events that require the expenditure of a Treasurer's advance to support communities, and we will not shy away from that practice.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask you to draw the Premier back to actually answering the question as to how Victoria's interest bill could be unforeseen given the state debt that we have.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: housing

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (14:26): It is really simple: more homes means more opportunity for all Victorians, but especially for younger generations. Every weekend another round of auctions passes. For some it is good news; for others it is another disappointment. Young people want homes in the communities they love, grew up in and want to live in. The Premier's announcements last week will be a game changer. New zones in Melbourne's inner suburbs will deliver housing near good public transport and of course education. We are slashing stamp duty on off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses, and of course unlocking new land will increase affordable homes. And this government is taking a commonsense approach to allow subdividing on your own block.

Last week, together with the hardworking member for Broadmeadows, I visited the Broadmeadows youth foyer, and of course we met a great team. The work the Launch Housing team does provides

young people with temporary accommodation and support services. We spoke to a young resident who wants to transition into her own home. And of course I had the opportunity, together with the member for Greenvale, to meet with student leaders across Greenvale Secondary College. They were fantastic. We got to hear firsthand their love for their diverse and multicultural community. Let us be clear: we are making it easier for young people to get into secure homes, and the other side quite frankly continue to be blockers who are fixated on ending the dreams of the next generation, including their own frontbench.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, according to Speaker Brooks's ruling, attacks on the opposition in ministers statements are out of order.

The SPEAKER: Minister, I ask you to not attack the opposition.

Natalie SULEYMAN: Let us be very clear: Labor is the party of aspiration, because our young people deserve to have a place to call their own.

Taxation

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:29): My question is to the Premier. The government has –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Narre Warren North can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Narre Warren North withdrew from chamber.

John PESUTTO: The government has dropped its commitment to a more efficient tax system from the economic growth statement. Does Victoria have the most efficient tax system in the country?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:30): I am delighted to have the opportunity to talk about how our government is focused on creating jobs and growing the economy. That has been a priority of mine from the very first day I became Premier, appointing a Minister for Economic Growth and focusing on how we can work with business and industry in this great state to grow and support jobs. We are seeing that the latest ABS data shows that more jobs have been created in Victoria in the last 12 months than in any other state – 130,000 jobs –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question was about the tax system. I think the Premier has picked up the wrong cheat sheet.

The SPEAKER: If the Manager of Opposition Business wishes to raise points of order, I ask him to not have commentary around them. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked, because it referred to economic growth.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, facts provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that Victoria has created more jobs than any other state in the last 12 months – 130,000 jobs – and we want to continue to support businesses into the future. I was asked about Victoria's tax base and also about the efficiency of our tax system. I noticed this week that there was commentary made by some about whether they supported the land tax system here in this state. The answer from the Leader of the Opposition was yes, he did. So it appears that there is one thing –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition is being entirely disorderly and unparliamentary with his ongoing commentary across the chamber. Can the Leader of the Opposition not stand by his own commentary? I am happy to play back the tape from ABC Melbourne on Monday morning to the Leader of the Opposition. If this individual is so untrustworthy that he is denying something he said 48 hours ago –

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question, and I ask you to bring her back to answering, 'Does Victoria have the most efficient tax system in this state?'

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Nationals knows it is not an opportunity to repeat the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, I just want to raise standing order 58 again to make the point to those on the other side that the Premier is being entirely factual in her response to the question, which is her obligation under the standing orders.

The SPEAKER: It is not for me to determine the factualness of answers or questions. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked, but I do remind the Premier not to attack the opposition.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is a comment the Treasurer has made on a number of occasions: where there are opportunities to improve the efficiency and delivery of our tax system, we will look at those opportunities. Indeed the house is looking at debating just this week another example of how we are cutting tax to support the building of more homes here in Victoria. This goes alongside the 64 taxes and charges that have been abolished during our time in government. That includes things like lifting the payroll tax free threshold on multiple occasions, particularly saving small businesses. But I just want to make this final point: when we talk about taxes, when we talk about revenue, we must also talk about why. Why are we collecting revenue? So we can support teachers in our schools, nurses in our hospitals and police on the street – very clearly, the same frontline services that those opposite would cut with their American-style debt ceiling they announced today.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:34): With Victoria having the highest unemployment, the highest debt, the highest CBD vacancy rates, the highest WorkCover premiums and the highest tax-to-GST ratio, how can the Premier defend Victoria's tax system?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): I remind the Leader of the Opposition that it is a tax system that on Monday morning he appeared to support on radio. On Monday morning when he was asked about his support for the tax system, he said that he did. It is Wednesday afternoon, so he could very well have come up with a different position, demonstrating that you just cannot trust from one day to the next what the Leader of the Opposition will say. I will say this to the Leader of the Opposition: we are creating more jobs than any other state. We are approving and building more homes than any other state.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition can try and shout and interject in that shrill little way that he does continuously throughout question time –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, I once again contend that the Premier was being entirely factual in her response.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The facts I was providing: approving and completing more homes than any other state; the best job creation of any state; and good, strong business investment compared to other states. These are the facts that I am focused on, and supporting jobs.

Ministers statements: planning policy

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:36): As the Allan Labor government gets on and builds more homes for Victorians, we are also creating more opportunities for young Victorians and families to find a place to call home and opportunities to enhance the things we absolutely love about our communities, like parks, gardens and open spaces. This week I was so pleased to join the Premier, the wonderful member for Footscray and her beautiful

dog Maggie at Hansen Reserve in West Footscray to announce Pick My Park, a $30 million program to upgrade the parks we already love as well as create new open spaces from underutilised land. Pick My Park will deliver more opportunities for more parks, open spaces and gardens, and the best part is that Victorians will get to put forward their own ideas and then vote for them.

This is not just about more homes, it is about better communities too, and that is why last week we announced another $150 million to support our growing communities with better public transport services. We are also working with industry to introduce a fairer system where property developers contribute to funding local infrastructure, parks and services. We are an infrastructure government. Whether it is building a better public transport system or schools or better community infrastructure or more homes, Labor are builders. You cannot trust those opposite when it comes to building homes and communities. They failed Victorians –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, former Speaker Brooks ruled that attacks on the opposition are inappropriate in ministers statements.

The SPEAKER: I am forever grateful to former Speaker Brooks. Please refrain from attacking the opposition, Minister.

Sonya KILKENNY: I just remind those opposite that they failed to plan for more community spaces, more parks and more schools. Fishermans Bend is just one example. Unlike those opposite, we understand how important community infrastructure is for our communities.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is defying your ruling.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, I would suggest that the minister is not defying your ruling at all. In fact she is referring to the actions of the previous government, which is entirely permissible under the standing orders. It is an actual fact that the former government failed to deliver the open space that our communities need.

The SPEAKER: Points of order are not to be used to make a statement to the chamber. The minister will come back to her ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Sonya KILKENNY: And where is Mr Skyscraper? Anyway, we are making sure we are building more homes in our suburbs. Communities will have the wonderful shared spaces that they deserve.

Economic policy

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:40): My question is to the Premier. Over the past year Victoria recorded negative real wage growth. Why are Victorian workers financially worse off under this Labor Premier?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): In order to take home a pay packet, you have got to have a job. To have a job under this government, it means working in our hospitals, in our schools and on our transport projects. We know those opposite have a plan to cut frontline services, and we know they have a plan to cut the jobs on the Suburban Rail Loop as well.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is an important point because the plan was revealed today for cuts and closures by those opposite, but when it comes to the action of our government to support wages growth, we are working with our great, hardworking public servants, who have been a bit of a feature of the conversation this afternoon. When it comes to our own workforce, I refer the –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about wages growth, and when it comes to working with our own workforce, I refer the member to the enterprise bargaining agreement outcome where we have backed our nurses. We have backed our nurses really hard by supporting them with a 28 per cent pay increase over the life of their agreement. That is an example –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick! The member for Sunbury can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is answering a question that was not asked. It was about why Victorian workers have recorded negative real wage growth in this economy.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question, which asked about wages growth. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question, but she was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will say this to Victorian workers: we will continue to back you and be on your side, particularly when it comes to supporting the frontline services Victorian families and workers rely on – unlike those opposite, who always look for the chance to cut.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:43): After 10 long years of Labor, Victorians' real household disposable income has fallen. Why are Victorians poorer now than they were before Labor was elected?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:44): It is challenging to answer a question that does not provide any evidence for the claim that is being made in the member's question. So in answering the question, I will say to the member for Sandringham that in terms of supporting households here in Victoria we are absolutely focused on supporting households with a range of cost-of-living relief and support. We know and acknowledge that households in Victoria, as they are around the country, are doing it tough as a consequence of successive interest rate rises and the inflationary pressures that are being felt on households right around the country. That is why we are rolling out right now the school saving bonus, free kinder and free TAFE – practical supports that are providing support for those households who, yes, I acknowledge are doing it tough. In our government, we are going to back them and support them.

Ministers statements: rental reform

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:45): Renters rights are all about respect, and that is why this Labor government has already delivered more than 130 rental reforms, leading the nation in this work. To those opposite who have this week asked questions about this government's appetite for further reform, listen up. Today we have announced a further six rental reforms. We will stop property owners making spurious bond claims without evidence. We will ban no-cause evictions, meaning you cannot be kicked out of your home without a valid reason. We will cap the cost for a renter if they need to break a lease. We will ensure renters can pay their rent without incurring any additional fees; they should only pay the rent they owe. We will crack down on extra fees charged to renters for background checks as a part of their rental application. We will also ensure renters can get a spare key or fob without a hassle, because the little things can make a very big difference. We will introduce penalties to ensure that those doing the wrong thing are the ones to pay.

Some part-time political commentators up there in the back seats can commentate from the sidelines without ever delivering a single thing for renters, but on this side of the house we do the work. While their friends the Liberals vote against the basics like new minimum standards, we are making renting fairer. We are ensuring those unfair fees are abolished. We are ensuring that you cannot be evicted because your landlord wants to jack up the rent and ensuring that a bond claim must be evidenced. Only Labor delivers for renters.

Economic policy

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:47): My question is to the Premier. Ahead of the last election, Labor promised to fund their commitments without 'increasing net debt'. Net debt has increased in the last two budgets. How much interest are Victorians now paying on that debt per day?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:48): I was asked a question in regard to the fiscal position of the state insofar as it relates to the debt position. The member referred to the position – I assume she was referring to November 2022 – when the government was elected in significant number following that election result. What has also happened over that period of time –

Jess Wilson: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very simple question.

The SPEAKER: The member for Kew referred to the last election. The Premier has only had 30 seconds, and she is referring to the last election.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course over a period of time things do not stand still. I know that might be a shock to those opposite, but things do not –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Would members on my left like to hear the answer? Yes? Then please stop interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: Over the period of time since that election there have been – I am sure the member for Kew will be delighted to correct it – something like 13 successive interest rate rises. We all know, whether it is your own personal –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is an important point because governments need to make sure that they retain the tools and the ability to make decisions depending on the circumstances of the day. When you have a mechanism in place – for example, just to pick one example, if you were to have in place, say, an American-style debt cap –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be direct. This question simply asked how much interest Victorians are paying. The Premier should know the answer to that question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask for no commentary. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is an important point because there are always going to be different propositions put to the Victorian community. There is a proposition that has been put to the community today that we –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, what is the point of question time if, when we simply ask how much interest –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

John Pesutto: What is the point of question time –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

John Pesutto: On relevance. You do allow the manager of government business a wide berth.

The SPEAKER: Order! What is your point of order?

John Pesutto: What point is there to question time if, when we simply ask how much –

The SPEAKER: Are you raising a point of order?

John Pesutto: Do not worry; I will not proceed. I am not going to be given a chance to raise it.

The SPEAKER: Points of order are to be direct and succinct. They are not an opportunity to make a statement to the house, nor to question rulings from the Chair. If your point of order is on relevance, then I ask you to state that it is on relevance without additional commentary. On relevance?

John Pesutto: On relevance, Speaker, the question was simply about how much interest per day. We cannot make it any simpler.

The SPEAKER: I understand the question was very direct. I have asked the Premier to come back to answering the question. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I remind the house and the Leader of the Opposition that I was asked a question about commitments made at the last election insofar as they relate to debt and the fiscal strategy. I was being entirely relevant to that question, and in answering that question I was indicating –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eildon can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was indicating to the house that of course different governments will make choices, and there has been a proposition put to the Victorian community today that there should be an American-style debt ceiling put in place.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we are 2½ minutes in and the Premier has not answered the very simple question 'How much interest are Victorians paying?'. The Premier should know.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. I am very aware of the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier has been relentlessly interrupted by those on the other side during question time to the point of bullying.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order? I ask you to state your point of order.

Mary-Anne Thomas: I ask that you direct those on the other side to show some respect.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. However, members have been so disrespectful to each other today. It is really disappointing. I have said the Premier needs to come back to answering the question. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I would have thought the opposition would have welcomed some discussion about some announcements they made today. Clearly they do not want to, because they know that an American-style debt ceiling means cuts to the Victorian community.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, you have asked the Premier to come to the question three times. Three times you have asked the Premier to come to the question. I would say that the Premier is defying your ruling.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:54): Future generations of Victorians have been burdened with $187.8 billion of Labor debt. Given that the Premier failed to answer the previous question, how much interest are Victorians now paying on that debt today?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Transport Infrastructure, you will have to leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Transport Infrastructure withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:55): I remind the Shadow Minister for Finance that the budget papers provide all of this information for her attention. I also will take up the reference to –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the question related to the interest payment today, not in May.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Kew, you have asked your question. The Premier has only just started. She has had 15 seconds. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: In answering the question, the question went to, as referenced by the member, future generations being burdened with debt. Do you know what the debt is paying for right now? It is paying for investments in the productive transport infrastructure that is going to benefit future generations.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question and is now on two questions and fails to be able to answer them.

The SPEAKER: If that was on relevance, the Premier was being relevant in relation to the burden for future generations that was mentioned at the start of the question. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I appreciate the repeat pattern of behaviour from the opposition. They do not like it when you present them with facts and evidence in response to their questions. The investments we are making in productive infrastructure are going to benefit future generations, just like investments, for example, in the city loop are benefiting us right now.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Kew can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Kew withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: housing

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:57): Big and important progress has been made in the past 12 months on building more homes for more Victorians to give them more opportunities. Victoria is on top of the ladder for approving, starting and finishing homes, more than any other state. Over 60,000 homes were built in Victoria over the past 12 months, 15,000 more than in New South Wales, and 18,000 more have been approved than in Queensland. We are also the only state or territory in the nation where housing affordability has improved. And we are going to keep this up. We are

going to keep building for our future this year, next year and so on into the future because ours is a building government, unlike some who just want to block.

There may be some from Brighton who want to block anyone wanting to have the chance of finding a home close to the Brighton train station. But we are not going to let the blockers block. We will be working, for example, around the 50 activity centres to be able to build 300,000 more homes over the decades ahead for those young Victorians – homes exactly where you want them, close to public transport services and to schools upgraded by the Labor government so those future generations can benefit from that productive investment in infrastructure. I will not let those blockers opposite stop those future generations from having the chance that we have had of having the dignity of finding their own home to build their long-term wealth. The blockers may have a different view, and they may well explain that to the community. We are focused on building for the future of this state, getting on and supporting younger Victorians to be able to have their dream of their own home.

Constituency questions

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (15:00): (870) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and I ask: when will a fully weatherproof waiting area be built on the new elevated Croydon railway station platform? A major flaw raised with my office on multiple occasions is that the waiting room at the new station is located on the ground floor, meaning commuters need to make their way up to the platform in plenty of time before the train arrives, leaving them exposed to the elements during inclement weather. The anxiety this causes for the passengers who are older and have mobility issues is extreme, as they are worried about getting to the elevator platform in time, particularly if there are multiple users of the lifts who have mobility aids, wheelchairs or prams. The current seating areas on the platform, although under a roof line, are insufficient for Melbourne's inclement weather, particularly during windy and rainy days as commuters are exposed to these elements when on the elevated platform. There is a small space near the lift doors that offers a bit of reprieve from the weather, but as the partition does not go all the way to the roof line, it allows for sweeping wind and rain to impact commuters. This current set-up is insufficient for commuters and needs addressing as soon as possible.

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (15:01): (871) Some people say I am barking up the wrong tree, but new dog parks are going off. Thank you to the member for Mordialloc for that pun; I appreciate it. I had not used that in one of my contributions on this new dog park in Wantirna. My question to the Minister for Environment is: when will construction start on the new dog park and playground at Wantirna Reserve in Wantirna? It is all happening. This was an election commitment made in 2022, out there with my wife and our cavoodle Penny, our beautiful pooch. She will be one of the inaugural doggos getting down there, enjoying all it has to offer. It will be delivered by Knox City Council, our good delivery partners. I cannot wait. Of course there has been a great round of community consultation to make this the best dog park in the state, which I am sure it absolutely will be. I am out of dog puns; I have got nothing left. But when will construction start?

Gippsland South electorate

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:02): (872) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the information I seek is: what works will be undertaken on the South Gippsland Highway as part of this year's road maintenance program? The minister revealed to me last year that a staggering 2739 potholes had been filled on the South Gippy highway in just four months. I would report to the minister that the South Gippy highway is still in an appalling state – in fact it has probably got worse. Tragically we had a fatality on the highway yesterday, and I am not suggesting that is related to the condition of the road – we do not know why that occurred. But many people have contacted me since, and they are concerned at the state of the South Gippsland Highway. The

government is talking up its road maintenance plans, so what is in it for the South Gippsland Highway this summer?

Cranbourne electorate

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:03): (873) My constituency question is to the hardworking Minister for Environment. How many containers have been recycled through the container deposit scheme in my electorate of Cranbourne? I am very fortunate to drive past the Cranbourne West container deposit scheme location, and I see queues of people in the morning. It is so terrific to see the enthusiasm that this scheme has been taken up with in my electorate. I also do not live very far from the Cranbourne South General Store, where there is another location. It has been very enthusiastically greeted by my community. I am very much looking forward to the minister's response, because it has been greatly welcomed, and I will be sharing that response with my community.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (15:04): (874) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will VicRoads undertake essential mowing of median strips on state roads in the Knox council area? Residents are just in disbelief on how high the grass has grown along median strips along Wellington, Stud, Napoleon, Lysterfield, Ferntree Gully, Burwood and High Street roads. Residents have noted that it is getting to the point where the grass is actually higher than the roadsides, making it impossible to view road signs. This is dangerous. One resident was genuinely fearful that a person operating a mower would injure themselves running over fallen signs that are unable to be seen through the grass. I suspect it is yet another budget cut by the state Labor government and VicRoads. I hope that vital road maintenance is not just the next item on the Labor Party's chopping block.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:05): (875) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. How can the Victorian government, Department of Transport and Planning, and VicRoads work with my local community to help make Melville Road safer for locals? Melville Road is an important north–south road of state significance connecting local families and residents through Pascoe Vale South, Coburg West and Brunswick West with the Bell–Melville shopping precinct, Shore Reserve, Moreland Road shopping precinct, Campbell Turnbull Library, Dunstan Reserve, Jacobs Reserve, Brunswick Secondary College, Union Square shopping centre, and importantly, both the Brunswick North West Primary School and St Joseph's Primary School communities. However, over recent years and particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, locals have continued to raise concerns with me about the increasing congestion and dangerous and hazardous road behaviours along Melville Road that are compromising the safety of vulnerable road users. In this respect, locals would greatly welcome consideration of a number of new measures to help make the corridor safer for all, including a holistic review of the Melville Road corridor to make it safer, safer 50-kilometre speed standard limits, new dedicated 40-kilometre speed zones for Brunswick North West Primary and St Joseph's Primary School communities, along with a whole number of other road safety measures.

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:06): (876) My question is to the Minister for Housing. Why is Labor wasting $360 million to demolish public housing in my electorate when there is a better alternative on offer? Beza came to Melbourne after leaving Ethiopia at the age of 12. She studied here and has worked as a nurse at the Royal Melbourne Hospital for 10 years. A personal crisis during the height of the pandemic in 2021 meant she faced the prospect of homelessness as a single mother, but Beza found a home at the Flemington public housing estate. She says public housing saved her life and the life of her child. But right now she is terrified because in the middle of a housing crisis Labor wants to kick her family out of her home, demolish the building and then use this land to build mostly private apartments. What makes this plan even more baffling is that demolishing the towers is actually

more expensive than the government retrofitting those buildings and building new public housing on the site. This plan makes absolutely no sense and is a waste of money.

Melton electorate

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (15:07): (877) My question is for the Minister for Veterans. How does the Allan Labor government's free travel on Remembrance Day for veterans benefit and support the serving members and veterans of the Melton electorate on Monday 11 November? Free travel is extended to school students, scouts, guides, Australian Defence Force cadets and band members in uniform travelling to commemoration events. Organisations like the Melton RSL Young Diggers are incredibly important to the lives of the 1 per cent of Meltonians who have served or are serving in the Australian Defence Force and their families. In the coming years I hope see the ABS collect some data around the service of our new Australians too. Next year in April it will be 50 years since the end of the war in Vietnam, which was the longest engagement in Australian military history until the war in Afghanistan. I look forward to once again commemorating Remembrance Day in Melton.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:08): (878) My question is to the Minister for Water in the other place. Can the minister provide feedback on how many leases under the stewardship of Goulburn–Murray Water remain unresolved? Twice recently I have been approached with disturbingly similar tales. Phil Singleton at the Kangaroo General Store at Lake Hume has been without a lease since 2005. He has been actively trying to finalise paperwork since 2017, only to be frustrated by Goulburn–Murray Water and its lawyers to firstly get a draft lease and secondly see the special conditions attached to that lease. Phil wants to sell, but without a lease he has nothing. Albury Wodonga Sailing Club, also on Lake Hume, have been trying to renew their lease for more than two years. They have a ridiculously long email trial that documents the lack of action with repeated requests for updates. The club needs some refurbishment, but that relies on the certainty of a lease. How many others are like this? Who is holding this up?

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:08): (879) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the question I ask is: how, Minister, is the department working to address the need for new and improved public transport services, including bus services, in growth areas such as Wollert? The population in Wollert is growing, and I have recently had many conversations with residents about their changing needs, including the need for public transport services. Residents with children in particular are eager to see better connections to community centres and schools that will enable their kids to travel independently around the electorate. I was excited to join the Premier at Edgars Creek with the Minister for Planning last week, where she toured the school and met with students, the principal and staff. Following the visit the Premier announced another round of growth areas infrastructure contribution funding that will be open to support more public transport in growth areas. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with the community in the Wollert area.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, if I may refer you to Speaker Languiller's ruling of 15 April 2015 in relation to constituency questions and the not adequate rule, may I ask if you would mind reviewing question 854 to the Premier. The Premier is responsible for government, and the answer seemingly suggested the Premier was not able to answer a question. I think that the not adequate rule, frankly, would suggest that the Premier might have a second go at the question. I do not think it is reasonable for the Premier to not be able to answer questions. I do note the former Premier never had that problem.

The SPEAKER: I will provide a response to the Manager of Opposition Business in due course.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:10): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024 this afternoon, and it is actually great timing for me to be able to stand in this place and again speak on education and training reform. Before I begin my contribution, I want to put onto the record something pretty amazing and a little bit sad that happened last week. One of my fabulous and much-loved staff members Maryam Saberi, who has been with me for two years helping out in my office – my little 2IC and the most positive young woman I think I have ever come across – left on Friday. I am very happy to say, but very sad to say, she left me to go on and be a teacher. Folks, when she arrived in this country from a very distant land, Iran, she did not speak English. She went to Western English Language School in Braybrook and learned how to speak a bit of English before she went on to finish her high schooling at Hoppers Crossing Secondary College. When I asked Maryam why she wanted to be a teacher she gave me a response I have not heard for a very, very long time, and this really goes to the heart of why teaching and being an educator is so important in this state. Maryam looked at me and smiled and said, 'I just love children. I love them.' She scored a great role at a school in Wyndham Vale. I was pretty upset that it was not in one of the many brand new schools that we have built in Truganina. Out in Wyndham Vale she started on Monday, and I am sure she will be doing an absolutely tremendous job there. But it was very sad to lose her – and to lose her on Friday last week, which was a celebration of teachers right across the world in fact. It was a really moving moment there with my Maryam as she went off to be a teacher.

But I do have to say it has been a really good week here. We have had legislation introduced, and we have the opportunity to speak on some of my favourite policy areas – education included, and the other one, yes, is transport. It is always clear that this Labor government values and contributes enormously to Victoria being the Education State. For so many Victorians, the vast majority of whom cannot yet vote and have their say in the democratic process, education is the most important investment we can make in their lives, because it is about affecting their futures. I see it whenever I am out and about in my electorate visiting local schools in my community. When we visit our brand new schools in the outer west, schools that we have built and opened, I see time and time again how these investments are making an absolutely profound difference in the lives of local kids in my community. Because as much as we can talk about the awesome work that teachers do, and indeed we can, as well as the work we have done in strengthening our education curriculum, I know like most parents I was pleased to see some of the announcements we recently made about phonetics and improving literacy outcomes.

This is all pointless if we do not have the four walls and a roof that make up a classroom for kids to learn in. I say time and time again: our kids deserve a first-class education in a world-class facility, and indeed that is what we are building in the outer west. It is not just in the outer west that we are building brand new schools, we are upgrading at a tremendous rate existing and established schools in the middle and inner suburbs of Melbourne's west. Seeing the transformation of these classrooms, which could be dark and dingy and smell of mould and must, actually reminded me of what my school looked and smelled like.

When we do these upgrades it is incredible to see the transformation, and the kids cannot believe it. In fact one of the upgrades that we did that caused the most amount of excitement – and I have to say it gave me the most amount of joy to go ahead and cut a ribbon earlier in the year – was at Ardeer South Primary School when we upgraded their toilet block. The kids could not believe how fantastic it was to have new dunnies at their school, and they could not wait to use them. I have to say they looked amazing. They looked absolutely amazing. They were light, they were welcoming, kids felt safe, and they were more than happy to use them. These are the kinds of investments that matter, as well as the investments into our educators.

What I do want to put on record is that – I was pretty impressed when I read these stats – in the past 10 years our Labor government has gone ahead and built 50 per cent of all new schools in Australia, full stop. Ten per cent, people – 10 per cent – of all new schools nationwide have been built in Wyndham, and I think that is pretty incredible. I know that when I am at these schools and I look at the state-of-the-art learning facilities, I could only dream of that when I was a child, and I am reminded each and every single day of how important that is.

Just a few months ago I was fortunate enough to have the Premier pop over to Sunshine. Sunshine Primary School, as the member for Footscray will know, is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, schools in my electorate, and you would not know it. You would not know that that is a truly old school, because we have just finished an $11 million upgrade, which has completely transformed that school. We are transforming the patch of land just next door, because we are building Sunshine primary kinder – brand new kinder – so folks can get rid of that double drop-off. I have to say that transformation of that school, even keeping it in line with its heritage, is just truly amazing, and the principal, teachers, kids, school community and parents could not believe what an $11 million investment upgrade to that school could do.

I am not just talking about building new schools. We know that we are rolling out three- and four-year-old kinder so our kids get the best start to their school life and live out, most importantly, their best life. That early childhood education is just so important. We have not just made kinder free so that no child misses out on going to kinder and to save parents thousands of dollars each year. We are also going ahead and assisting folks with the cost of living by introducing the $400 school savings bonus, which came out in the budget earlier this year, and that was really to help families with school-aged kids cover those common costs associated with education, be it uniforms, textbooks, camps, excursions and so much more. It is also helping out families by us continuing to roll out the school breakfast club, and we are now doing that to all government schools so that no child goes hungry. And as someone who loves being on toaster duties at my local schools, I cannot tell you how popular school breakfast club is. It is not just about the kids that have not been able to have a feed before school but about kids wanting a second or third breakfast just because they love toast. I would like to say toast and Vegemite, but it turns out that toast with butter or toast and honey is really popular as well.

But of course it is not just about the students. We have done a lot to support our hardworking teachers as well, including the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, which includes the teaching excellence program. We have helped new teaching students cover the cost of their degree through scholarships so that more students get to see teaching as a viable profession. It is an incredibly important profession, and dare I say it is an essential service. On top of that, we are also supporting more teaching students, just like my Maryam, and teachers taking up teaching posts in regional Victoria so that our regional schools have the staff that they need to give their kids a great education as well.

There is just so much happening in this space, and looking at the time I have got left in under 90 seconds I will not go into everything that sits under that list. I said earlier in my contribution – and I will say it again – Labor has built the Education State. And when it comes to our schools, I say to parents time and time again, regardless of where they live, regardless of their postcode or neighbourhood: we have got your back.

Our record on schools and education, quite frankly, speaks for itself. Those stats around the new schools being built in Wyndham are truly, truly extraordinary.

Whilst this bill introduces a number of pretty small changes, particularly around tackling noncompliant schools which are not registered, this bill is yet another step forward, an important step forward, towards creating a stronger and fairer education system. I cannot support that enough. I do want to commend the minister for the incredible work that he has been undertaking since taking up the role here in this place. I know that time and time again he has come out to my electorate, and principals,

parents and students have welcomed him with open arms. I am looking forward to having him back out. I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:21): Acting Speaker O'Keeffe, it is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024 with you in the chair steering the ship for a little bit this afternoon, so I thank you for that. I would also like to thank the member for Kew, who led us off with the amendment bill that we are reading today, and I noticed that she did say that we are not opposing the bill. Like a lot of others that have stood up to speak in the chamber today, I would also like to offer my thoughts and condolences to the Auburn South Primary School, where tragically that incident happened yesterday. As other members have risen and spoken about, our thoughts and love go out to families, friends and the teachers and everyone involved out there.

This Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill makes a number of technical amendments to the act that appear to be aimed at strengthening deterrent mechanisms against unregistered schools and school boarding premises. As we do, most of us send our children to mainstream schools where there are rules and regulations that need to be followed, whether we are in metropolitan Melbourne or we are out and about in regional Victoria, in major regional centres or if we are out in the far reaches of the region and we are at smaller country schools. They all do a magnificent job. We need to make sure that right across the board, no matter where you are sending your children, we have certain procedures in place and standards that need to be followed so that kids are getting the proper education that they do need and are getting it safely with all those requirements. The changes in this to strengthen that and make sure that happens, for a regional MP, make a lot of sense, and it is great to be able to be not opposing this bill today.

It also empowers school principals to delegate their current authority to make work experience arrangements. Our principals do a sterling job. It does not matter what school they are in; their work day is not just made up of doing stuff for the school. They are the overseers of everything that goes on around that school and out into the community. For them to be able to offload certain bits and pieces of their job to make their time more streamlined and give them a little bit more of a family life at home I think is a good thing. You will notice with principals and also with vice-principals and senior staff that they are up to the challenge of being able to be delegated those roles. I know that schools in my electorate – it does not matter if we are talking about Moe, Newborough, Morwell or Traralgon as the main centre through the Latrobe Valley or reaching out into our other centres at Churchill, Tyers, Glengarry and Yallourn North, all the schools there – all do such a great job.

I noticed the member for Laverton talking about the breakfast program, and obviously it is right around Victoria. I have seen it firsthand – probably not as much as an MP, but in my previous role as a plumber I did a lot of maintenance in all the schools that were right around through the electorate of Morwell and the greater Latrobe Valley and saw the difference that those breakfast programs made to the children. It was very pleasing to hear of the member for Laverton putting up her hand and cooking the toast and so forth, because that does go on, and I have done it a couple of times myself.

Touching on my time doing maintenance in the schools, that is one of the major issues at the moment in schools through the Latrobe Valley – the upkeep of making sure that the roof is not leaking, the toilets are up to a standard, the walkways that the kids are walking on are sound – and it makes me wonder sometimes that the schools are left in the lurch a little bit having to provide moneys to actually keep up with these particular maintenance programs.

I was at a school not so long ago, and they have a make-safe program. I talked to the principal about how the make-safe program works and how the people that run the make-safe program do come out and actually have a look and see what the issue is in the school. It is not only the school I was at; I did follow up with some other schools. For the procedure to actually rectify these issues that occur – whether it be removing asbestos or the new one at the moment, which is black mould within schools, which does cause a little bit of grief – it is nine times out of 10 left up to the schools to use their budgets, what they are meant to be using to pay for relief teachers and so forth. They are now having to use that

budget to pay for some of these rectifications. I think that there should be another avenue. If they are coming out to make safe these certain situations where there has been a water leak or a floor has collapsed or a wall is moving about, it should not be up to the school to provide this money to actually fix the problem. I think that should be part of the program.

It does put a lot of pressure on the principals and the teachers and the actual maintenance staff that are inside those schools to, one, highlight that there is an issue, and this goes for most schools out in the regions. We are lucky some of our schools have had – not full redevelopments – new classrooms here and there, but a lot a lot of our schools that are on the outskirts of our major city centres are still working out of portables which have been probably onsite for many a year, and when I say 'many a year' I mean probably 20 or 30 years. The schools are thrown into the situation where they have to make sure that the upkeep on these facilities is sound so the children have somewhere safe to learn, and it does make it very, very hard when the school moneys are being spent on maintenance and they are having to choose, so they actually do not have a relief teacher to come.

There are pressures there too for the principals trying to supply a full staff to their schools. There is not a bidding war – I would not call it that – but teachers at the end of the year do have opportunities to move around to other schools. If we cannot fill those positions, we do have the situation where teachers from outside the area are coming down, travelling down daily from the city – and we do thank them for doing that – to fill the roles of teaching to teach our kids out in the country areas. So there is the pressure that the spots are not filled for teachers to teach our kids, and it may be that they are not filled at all. It might be that a teacher is away on stress leave or they are sick and we need to fill those roles, because it is probably getting harder and harder for our educators to do the one thing that they put their hand up to do when they became a teacher, which is to actually sit in a classroom and teach our kids. It is the outside influence of trying to keep parents happy, because as I well know, teachers get 360 feedback from a lot of parents, which is most of the time unwarranted. Our teachers now are in the classrooms not only trying to educate our children but trying to teach them some manners as well, because they do not get that at home.

A big shout goes out to all our teachers down in the Latrobe Valley throughout all our schools. We have a lot of schools that are disadvantaged, so there are kids coming from backgrounds which are not as pleasant as what you would think.

Finally, before I finish, I know the exams are on for our year 12 students now, and I wish them all the best. My journey through education pulled up at year 10. I actually went into the workforce and went through TAFE and became a tradie, so there is always something out there. It does not matter how you actually get to stand here in the chamber in Parliament; whether you have an education and go through university or whether you are a year 10-educated person that goes into the trades and does their four years of TAFE, there is an opportunity to come and represent your community. To all those people out there: good luck, and all the best for you all.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:31): Before I begin, I would also like to express my sadness and condolences to the families, students, children, staff, teachers and principal at the Auburn South Primary School after the terrible, sad and shocking incident that occurred yesterday. That is all I can say on that.

Other than this terrible thing that happened yesterday, it has always been good to speak in here in the Parliament around education legislation and amendments, because it is such an important part of a state government's responsibilities, and it has the ability to change lives and provide great opportunities for the next generations that are coming up to make Victoria an even better place once they get through their schooling and even during their schooling and beyond.

This piece of legislation is the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. Like some of the other bills we have been debating this week, it is a bit of an omnibus around some amendments brought to the Training and Education Reform Act 2006. It is in various aspects about that piece of

legislation. For example, I will talk first about the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). It is providing some more powers and different powers for that authority, which is an authority independent of government. Its role is very important. It is around ensuring both the regulation and compliance of the regulations of our schools – all schools, really, state schools, and the non-government sector in particular, because that is outside, in many ways, the line of sight of government and some of the government's policies. It is so important because our children, students, need the best quality learning, and we need to ensure that there is the full curriculum and that the way the students are being treated, the resources they have and what they are being taught is in a very regulated manner and is up to the proper standards. I shout out to the authority for the work that they do.

This legislation is going to provide some more powers when it comes to schools that are not registered. Sometimes we look at these things and think, 'Gee, why is that not already happening?' But it is really just a matter where, over time, processes change, the way we do things changes. Perhaps the unregistered schools have changed in the way that they are doing something and therefore we have to make sure that legislation is kept up to date and is modernised and appropriate for how we operate now. In the case of the changes for the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, this bill provides further powers in terms of being able to request information. That information from the unregistered school is probably one of the easier ways to get evidence of things that they are not complying with in order for the VRQA to take action in response, ensuring that the students are protected and that what is going on in the school is correct or indeed if that school should continue.

Similarly there is some increase in penalties, so if there is a prosecution or an action taken against an unregistered school, there are strong penalties for those unlawful things or things that they are doing that they ought not be doing. Similarly there are provisions in here to allow that if a school itself voluntarily closes or is not in operation anymore, there is a loosening of the requirements that they have to go through in order to wind up, so it is not the same as a forced closure when of course it is a voluntary closure.

In talking about education it is always great to look at the area that you represent and see how things are going there, and I have to say, under the Allan and Andrews Labor governments we are up to about six brand new schools in just the Thomastown electorate alone in the new suburbs of North Epping and Wollert. There have also been around – and I am continuing to count – eight or nine existing schools in the older, established areas that have either been rebuilt or had really major upgrades to their facilities. It was only, I think, on Monday last week that I attended Lalor Secondary College. That is a fantastic building, and the principal talks about the changes that he has seen in the students being able to have such an incredibly modern and beautiful facility. There is a rooftop garden; there are all sorts of specialist learning areas and breakout areas. He was saying how in particular the year 12 students have most of this new learning area and how it is almost like they are university students rather than secondary students because of the way that they are feeling so much more respected in the surroundings they have. They are all looking after them and it really is, he said, an incredible change in the behaviour of all the students.

When you hear stories like that you can see how we can change people's lives, especially young people's lives. If we give them the right facilities and the right environment, then they will thrive, and I am really looking forward to seeing how they are all going this year for the exams that are coming up for year 12. I would like to wish all the students well and of course the school itself well in its journey to provide the best possible education for students. This is a school that is a school of choice in the centre of the suburb of Lalor, and in fact many students have come and done some sort of work experience with me and some of them have then later on worked with me on a casual basis while they are studying at university, which brings me to another change that this amendment bill is going to provide.

That is around freeing up – and again, small things added together are big things. We do hear from a number of the principals, and I have heard over recent times in particular even more from principals,

how much of a burden has been put on them in terms of administrative work and paperwork. And so one of the changes that this legislation if passed will provide is that principals, when it comes to work experience and other learning arrangements, can actually delegate that authority in terms of any sort of signing off or agreeing to such an agreement to other staff members at the school. Again, we might think, 'Well, that is, you know, a small part,' but these sorts of things all add up. If you have got 50, 60 or 100 students all doing work experience, you have got to sign each one, and these are things that all take up the principal's time, when of course they have much more important things that they can be doing while other staff members can sign off. Their skills are not so much more important but different skills that they can use rather than signing off arrangements like this.

So again, the Thomastown electorate has had a lot of investment when it comes to school capital, and on top of that there was a recent announcement of yet another breakfast club extending to the Wollert schools. That is on top of breakfast clubs in pretty well all of the schools in the older and established suburbs.

Again, you go into those areas – the kitchens, the meal areas – in the morning, and they are just a really good, fun place to be. The students are happy, everybody is eating together, they are talking about school, they are talking about other things and they are talking to the teachers, who are often in there as well, and the principal, as well as other staff, about issues that are concerning them at the time. And of course that is such an important way of making sure that we are monitoring what children are worried about and seeing if we can help them. Another big shout-out which I did not talk about with Lalor Secondary is their wellness and wellbeing centre, which is another really great place where there will be a lot of support for students that need that, and I am sure they will have great times there.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:41): Acting Speaker O'Keeffe, it is a pleasure to see you in that role. Firstly, I want to give my thoughts to the staff, students, families and friends of those involved with the tragic incident at Auburn South Primary School yesterday. Like many others, they have been in my thoughts, particularly the family who have lost their young son.

The Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024 that is before the house today is fairly well a technical bill, making a number of amendments to the act. These amendments are around the regulation of schools and other educational institutions in the main. This is a bill that no stakeholders are screaming out and calling for, but it is one that I think the department have decided to put forward. This appears to be aimed at strengthening deterrence mechanisms against unregistered school and school boarding premises. There is no actual definition of registered schools and unregistered schools, but clearly there has been an issue with organisations masquerading as schools when they are in fact not actually schools and not working with the curriculum as is anticipated and expected. It makes these changes mostly through the authority of the VRQA, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. Part of this bill is also around empowering school principals to delegate their current authority to make work experience arrangements, and I will talk about that a little bit later.

I want to tackle the bit on unregistered schools, and there have been examples raised where people have come together pretty well during the school day, as I understand it, during the week, gathering and pretending that they are a school, giving the impression that they are a school when they exactly are not a school. This is quite concerning, because if you are a school there are requirements and obligations that you are required to meet to be able to deliver education and expectations as well of what you will do. There has been a concern that this has not been the case in a number of instances. The department and the government are looking to tackle that particularly.

To do this, the bill increases the maximum penalties for entities found to be conducting an unregistered school or school boarding premises in Victoria. I probably should say the boarding premises are not necessarily teaching, but they may have some components in the evening where the kids get together and do class revision, but this bill extends to those. I guess the government is saying, 'We are very serious about this, and this is why we have the penalties that are in place.' The penalties that are being brought forward are in line with those for similar offences in other legislation, specifically section 103

of the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010, which provides penalties for the offence of operating an education and care service without approval. So this is all very much around approvals.

The penalties here are reasonably sizeable, from 10 penalty units to 120, and it ranges between $2000 and $24,000 under the current penalty unit rate. For body corporates, this is about 600 penalty units, which is about $120,000. The opposition, the Liberals and the Nationals, clearly believe in diversity of education and that parents should have a choice. We have very much supported educational choice across the public, independent and faith-based sectors and even homeschooling. But if there are organisations out there who are touting themselves as schools and they do not meet that basic criteria, I think that is something that definitely does need to be looked at.

I want to talk about the work experience arrangements, because at the moment the principals are the ones that have to sign off and authorise work experience. That might be okay if you are a small school with 20 kids in your year 10 cohort; you might be able to manage that. But if you are a school that has got six classes at year 10 level with 25 kids in each, it becomes quite onerous to know all the details. There are provisions here to delegate that, because as we know, the principals have a pretty tough workload, and I want to touch on the principals' workload. As I have said, if you are a principal in a small school, it is quite different to a larger school, because you have less resources. You still require the same level of compliance as a larger school, but you do not have anyone to delegate it to. Large schools may have two assistant principals. At a smaller school they do not have the budget luxury to do that, so it is the principals that are doing a lot of the work. I have many small schools in my area. I have got about 50 schools in my electorate, and I know at the smaller ones the principals are there late at night doing so much work after-hours and at home because of the demands that they have. They do not get that level of support.

It is certainly not all rosy out there in education land, and I want to talk about principal workload in a bit more detail. Not only in smaller schools do they have to manage the same levels of compliance as larger schools, but all the principals now are dealing with a lot more mental health, not just from the students but also from the teachers. For some of them this is a little bit foreign, and they are finding that they are having to have a greater level of understanding. There are some discipline issues that we hear consistently as well that they have to deal with. In any of the upgrades or new builds at schools the principals find themselves as project managers, and this is not what they are skilled in. Usually when there are builds, people in major construction projects become project managers, and here the principals find themselves as project managers. There are workforce shortages, and we are seeing classes consistently being brought together because they cannot cover somebody being sick. Sometimes they cannot cover the range of subjects that they previously have.

We have seen the federal government report on the COVID-19 response which was just released, which was actually pretty scathing – more so than the states anticipated – and it slammed approaches towards lockdowns, vaccine mandates and school and border closures, saying that they lacked transparency and compassion and were not evidence based. In Victoria we saw a huge issue because the schools were locked down for so long. Kids were not at school for a couple of years and missed out on so many basic skills. They were not learning how to interact with each other and with adults in and out of the classroom. They were not understanding how you behave in social situations and navigating the play in the playground. It has been exceptionally difficult. That report goes on to recommend avoiding school closures at all costs in pandemics. Why is that? We know in Victoria it was the worst outcome for our school students. I found the lessons learned from COVID-19 were the findings on the experience of remote and flexible learnings in schools, which was conducted by the Parliamentary Secretary for Schools before he was elevated to the Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change. Nowhere in that did I see them tackle the issues of kids not having been able to have access to friends, socialisation and learnings in informal settings within a schoolyard – and no recommendation, so that is particularly disappointing.

The Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee had an inquiry into the state education system and found that the Victorian curriculum is overcrowded. The teaching and learning model

needs an update to improve clarity and usability. There are increased workloads, burnout, remuneration and lack of career progression which are factors that are responsible for teachers leaving the sector, and that is crucial. The teacher-shortage crisis is a serious issue for the Department of Education.

There is nothing about the effectiveness of the financial incentives because of insufficient data. I saw at one of the schools where students in my electorate go that the kids were being geared up in year 11 to be able to study Italian, and they were advised with a couple of days notice that, 'Actually we're not going to be offering that as a VCE subject in Year 12, and you've got to change your decision.' There were a number of students there, and this had implications for them because they had chosen absolutely to study Italian with the understanding that it would be available in year 12 and that it would be one of their VCE subjects. The advice given to the students was 'Why don't you try biology, perhaps?' and that was something that none of them had a background in or perhaps were not even that interested in.

These teacher shortages are impacting on students in a number of ways. The government has failed the mental health of so many students through their handling of COVID and beyond and has more work to do.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): The member for Narre Warren North.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (15:51): Thank you, Acting Speaker, and it is lovely to see you in the chair as we head towards the MPI and as I am the last speaker before we have a bit of a break.

I would also like to send my love and support and prayers to the beautiful community of Auburn South Primary School. I think the whole chamber on both sides has been touched by the absolute tragedy that happened yesterday, and we cannot even fathom or imagine how the family and the community must be feeling. I know that we all send our love and thoughts to that community today.

Education – this is something that I could stand up and talk to you about for hours. We are very, very proud of our education program, of our schools and of what we offer. I think that is why we have been known as the Education State. It is very difficult when you go through a world pandemic. Things happen and things change, and hindsight is an incredible thing –

Cindy McLeish: Just ask Gladys; she got it right at the time.

Belinda WILSON: Well, it is interesting to talk about Gladys, isn't it, because Gladys does not have a job any longer for a number of different reasons.

I am really blessed to have over 19 schools in my electorate – an incredible community, which is really, really amazing; they are amazing people. Recently we had a morning tea with all of our principals and with the Minister for Education, which was a really, really great success. It gave them the opportunity to talk about all the wonderful things that they are doing in their schools and how thankful they are to the Labor government for the great programs that we are giving and offering them. It was really insightful to hear from a real range of principals and teachers, some that have been working for over 40 years as teachers and some that have only been principals for a couple of years, and also to hear about the challenges they are facing – you know, everything is not always perfect; they do face a number of different challenges. But it was a really great way of collaborating together.

It was really interesting to hear from especially the high schools about how they develop relationships with the universities to get teachers straight from when they are learning in university. I know the amazing team at Hallam Secondary College have got a great relationship with Deakin University and their teaching program, where they actually collaborate with them while they are doing their degrees. I know that Simon Sherlock, the incredible principal there at Hallam Secondary College – where we are just about to turn the sod on an incredible $24 million build there, which I am very excited about – said that program works really well because they are working with the student-teachers while they

are doing their teaching. It has been very successful for them. I know that is something that a lot of other schools are looking at doing as well.

I know a number of people on both sides of the chamber have spoken about the breakfast program. Every single one of my primary schools and in fact my secondary schools in my electorate – my state schools – all do the breakfast club program, which is incredible. Like the member for Laverton, I too love going along and handing out the juice boxes and making cheese toasties, which are all very popular, and seeing the delight on the kids' faces. I think it makes a real difference to parents if they have got to drop their children off at school early. A lot of my families have lots of children. We have a very big multicultural community, which we are really proud of.

Lots of our families have eight, nine, 10 or 12 children. When you are trying to drop off at high school, primary school and often kinder, it is really great to be able to know you can drop your child at school and they are going to get fed, so that program works really well. And I know how much the teachers actually enjoy it and the parents and friends associations. I was on the PFA with my kids for over eight years. The PFAs – the parents and friends associations – make a really great contribution to that program as well, helping out and having a chat to the kids. I think one of the things that I enjoyed the most was actually having a chat with the kids and seeing what was happening for the day, if they had anything going on and how excited they were about the program. It is a really, really great program.

The PFAs and school councils make a huge difference to schools. I know the school councils in my electorate really work well with their principals together to come up with great ideas not only to make a difference in their community but also to do fundraising, community events, colour days – all amazing, wonderful things like that that they really, really enjoy – which I know makes a difference to all schools.

The other thing that I love in my schools is my community hubs. I am really blessed to have two of those in my electorate. The community hubs work simultaneously and in hand with a school to really bring the parents in, especially those new arrivals or parents that do not know many people. They also run little kinder programs, so if you have got a little two- or three-year-old and you do not know any local people, you can actually come along to the community hub and have an integration and meet other members of the community. That was a really great initiative for the Allan Labor government to introduce. I think what is really great about these community hubs is that you can also have English language classes. We have some amazing English language classes that operate in a number of our schools, and it is a really great way of keeping the community together. I know I have spoken about this on a number of occasions, but school is really the heart of the community. It is where everyone is on an equal playing field, where opportunity is given to everybody. We work really hard to make sure we provide our schools with all the opportunity that they need.

We have spoken a lot today about not only the schools but also our feeders – our three- and four-year-old kinder programs that we are bringing into place, which is incredible. I have got a couple of those hubs that are happening as well. Having a kinder on the same site – as a mum who had three kids under four, one at kinder, one at playgroup, one at school – to think that I could have had them all in one precinct would have been an absolute godsend for me. It makes such a difference. I know some people think that that is a small thing, but really with families and working families these things make an absolutely huge difference to the community and to the families dropping off – especially when you got lots of children. As I was saying, many members in my community have eight, 10 or 12 children, which I find astonishing. I think three was more than enough for me, but having that amount of children is fantastic too. And I love going to schools and seeing all these families running around and enjoying themselves.

I have spoken about Hallam Secondary College and the incredible upgrade we are doing there. We are also doing an amazing upgrade, putting some fencing and also some taps and some wonderful things at Fleetwood Primary School. My other great project, which again we are also looking at turning the sod on in the next three or four months, is at James Cook Primary School. The team there are just

so excited about the renovations that are going to happen there, which is really, really exciting. I have also got my special school, which is in the midst of having their renovation finished. That should be finished in the next few months. One of the great things that I love about the special school is they have cut out little viewing blocks for all the kids at all different heights, because some of the kids are in wheelchairs and they are all different heights depending on what mobility they have got, and they can actually see the building going on from the school. So it is really nice for them to be able to see that.

At this point in time, and looking at the time, I would like to say that we have had a very broad conversation about this bill. This bill does fix up a number of different elements for education. I know we have all spoken a little bit about work experience, which is another great thing that many of us in this chamber do. At this moment I would like to commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Government performance

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

> That this house condemns the financial mismanagement and lack of budget transparency of the Allan Labor government.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:01): I do rise to address this matter of public importance. I thank you, Speaker, for accepting this matter of public importance which I submitted on behalf of the opposition, that this house condemns the financial mismanagement and lack of budget transparency of the Allan Labor government. Perhaps there should be a correction to this matter of public importance – perhaps it should say 'the Andrews now Allan Labor government', because Labor have been on the government benches for the last 10 years. They have been there for the last 10 years, and every single year they have introduced a new tax and increased existing taxes. That is what they do. That is what is in their DNA, and Victorians are paying the price each and every day because of the Labor taxes that this government has raised. Every couple of months there is a new or increased tax – every couple of months. You cannot see something walking by without Labor getting an idea: 'We will tax it.' It is in their DNA. They cannot help themselves. It is in their DNA, and Victorians are paying the price. Victoria has largest debt of any state in the nation – $188 billion, with a B, billion dollars, the largest debt of any state in the nation.

If you believe this government, and I do not, they will say that they used the state's credit card during COVID so that Victorian businesses and Victorians would not need to use theirs. Let us take their logic at face value just for a moment. They themselves, with the COVID debt recovery plan that they introduced not in this year's budget but in last year's budget, say that COVID spending was around $30 billion and that over the next 10 years they will increase revenue through new taxation measures in line with that $30 billion. Speaker, I may need your help with doing the sums here, or perhaps I do not – pretty straightforward. For $188 billion of debt, if you take the government's numbers and believe them and say there was $30 billion of debt created by COVID which now needs to be paid off through their COVID debt recovery plan, there is a difference of over $150 billion which is not related to COVID. So, please, I encourage all Victorians: do not look at what Labor is saying, look at what they do. They are not on your side. They say that they are on your side. They say that they care, but by their actions they do not. We on this side of the chamber care. We actually give a stuff about people in this state. We care for vulnerable Victorians because we think the economy matters. Over the last 10 years this lot have been absolutely and utterly reckless, and Victorians are paying the price.

I have got a message for the Premier. In question time today the member for Kew asked the Premier a pretty straightforward question: 'Premier,' the member for Kew asked, 'what is today's interest payment on your $188 billion worth of debt?' A substantial question, and then a –

Michaela Settle: Can you read?

Brad ROWSWELL: I can read. I can read. If you just pause for a moment, I will give you the punchline. $188 billion –

The SPEAKER: Member for Sandringham, through the Chair. The member for Eureka will cease interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: Today's interest payment is $17.8 million. Why? $17.8 million – I am sorry; I rushed over that. During the course of this matter of public importance this afternoon, the debt bomb is ticking over and ticking over and ticking over again – two million bucks of interest payments just in the next couple of hours. This is Labor's debt. But the tragedy of this debt that they have racked up over the last 10 years is that they have so much disregard for the Victorian people that they will not take responsibility for their actions. They are making Victorians pay the price for the decisions that they have made through higher taxes. They are making Victorians pay the price through waste on major projects – more than $40 billion of waste on major projects in the last 10 years alone. Victorians again are paying the price for the mismanagement of this Labor government. Victorians deserve so much better.

In the last 10 years, we have had 55 new or increased taxes, just over half of which are property taxes. As I said yesterday in this place – and I will say it again and I will say it slowly, because I know some members of the government struggle to understand this very, very basic principle – if you tax something more, it does not get any cheaper. If you tax something more, it gets more expensive, and someone needs to pay for that. Fundamentally Labor do not respect Victorian taxpayers. They do not respect hardworking Victorian taxpayers and Victorian taxpayer dollars. If they did, they would not have increased or introduced 55 taxes or charges over the last 10 years, but that is exactly what they have done.

The state of Victoria's economy at the minute, in my view – and I have described it before like this and I will do it again here today – is a bin fire. I cannot think of a better way to describe it. We have had the highest unemployment in the country now for six months running. We have got the highest property taxes in the country. We have got the highest business taxes in the country. We have got the slowest wage growth in the country. Just last year alone more than 152,000 businesses closed their doors in this state.

The government is shopping around for credit ratings. Historically you have gone to Moody's and S&P, and of course we have got the lowest credit rating of any state in the country. But they were not satisfied with that, so they used Victorian taxpayer money to go shopping around for a third credit rating. The government is using Victorian taxpayer dollars, which I contend they do not respect, to shop around for a better answer on their credit rating. They are trying to spin their way out of this instead of dealing with the matter at hand. If you spend more than you earn year on year on year on year for 10 years, it has consequences.

The great injustice of this is this: if I in my household or if someone else in their business spent more than we earned year on year on year, I would be responsible for the consequences and that business owner would be responsible for the consequences. But in this state, this government over the last 10 years have been spending more than they have been earning year on year on year, and Victorians are the people who are paying the price at a time when they can least afford it.

We all know in this place that we are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. Victorians are already under immense pressure to try and make ends meet. Victorians are hardworking people, they are aspirational people and they are optimistic people, and they are not being helped by a government which imposes punitive taxes upon them to limit their ability to create the best possible future for themselves, for their family, in their communities. This Labor government just does not care.

And then we heard on Sunday that the government's economic statement, which is mooted to be released in the next little while, has a raft of things in it but no tax reform.

How can you possibly bring an economic statement to the Victorian people and call it credible without there being tax reform in it? You see, this Labor government over the last 10 years have taxed and have taxed and have taxed again and have taxed some more. That is all they know. That is all they want to know. They have no intention, no aspiration, to reduce their tax burden on Victorians.

Under a Liberal–National government in this state lower, fairer and simpler taxes are well and truly on the way. They are on the way. A government that enables business to thrive is on its way – a government that will roll out more red carpet and less red tape to investors to restore investor confidence in this state, investor confidence that has been absolutely and utterly shot over the last 10 years under this Andrews, now Allan, Labor government. Over the last 10 years we have had a decade of debt, a decade of frankly dumb decisions. The Premier has changed – and we are at the 12-month anniversary of that – but the actions of the government have not. The cost of Labor is simply too high for Victorians. To the government, we say on this side: stop wasting Victorian taxpayer money and start treating Victorian taxpayer money with respect. Everyone in this building and this state knows that we on this side of the house will be the ones to clean up this mess. We will be the ones entrusted to clean up Labor's mess. But we are not here just to critique the government today. We contend that Labor cannot be trusted to clean up this mess. We contend that they created this mess and that the people who created the mess are not the people to clean it up. They cannot be trusted to clean it up.

What we want in Victoria is a bright, optimistic future where Victorians do not just survive, they thrive, where they have confidence to put their hand in their own back pocket to invest in our state to create the wealth and the opportunity that we so desperately, desperately need. This is in our DNA. This is who we are as members of the Liberal Party, as members of the National Party, as members of this state's alternative government. This is who we are. I say to Victorians: there is a bright future ahead of us after the November 2026 election. We will scrap Labor's schools tax, we will scrap Labor's health tax and we will scrap Labor's holiday and tourism tax – all taxes on aspiration, all taxes on opportunity, all taxes on growth that do not understand the cost pressures that are on Victorian communities at the moment. We will legislate a debt cap in this chamber. We will legislate that debt cap. We will reinstate a Victorian productivity commission. We will have a credible plan to pay down Labor's debt. We will end waste. We will shout from the rooftops to every Victorian, especially those businesses – those 152,000 businesses that have closed their doors in the last 12 months alone – and those Victorians who have left this state for greener pastures in New South Wales or in Queensland or in South Australia. We say to them that under a government we lead Victoria is open for business again.

We will govern for all Victorians, and today we announced our plan for financial integrity. We will establish a charter of budget honesty – the first state in Australia to do so. We will establish a real-time government spending tracker. We will commission Victoria's first intergenerational report. This is our plan, which I make available to the house. We on this side of the house are the only people who can be trusted to deliver the economic prosperity and opportunity that Victorians so desperately need and so desperately, desperately deserve, but it must start with integrity. It must start with integrity. This is the first pillar of our economic plan, the first important foundational pillar of our economic plan.

The next pillar of our economic plan is to announce a financial framework to indicate to Victorians how we are going to get out of the mess created by Labor over the last 10 years. I will be frank. I want to be frank; I want to be honest with the Victorian people. I say to them it has taken 10 years. It has taken 10 years for Labor to stuff the state and the state's economy in the way that it has. It is going to take at least a decade to stabilise the mess that they have created. I want Victorious to know that.

And the third pillar of our financial plan, the third and important pillar, is individual tax measures that will make life easier for Victorians and not harder. Our foundational announcement today is our

integrity announcement. It is so, so important. This work was established in July last year. Together with the Shadow Minister for Finance the member for Kew and the Leader of the Opposition the member for Hawthorn, we announced our tax discussion paper, an opportunity to engage with Victorians on the things that matter to them, to talk to Victorians to enable that conversation to take place, to understand and to listen to Victorians about the impact of Labor government decision-making on their lives, on their businesses and on the communities, and we have listened. The Victorians that we have spoken to have made it absolutely and abundantly clear: they do not trust this government to execute any meaningful reform, any reform at all, that will touch the sides of their existence. They do not. Which is why it is so fundamentally important for us to start with our first pillar of our economic plan today, which is to sort out the integrity question and the integrity cloud over this government. I say to all Victorians: Labor cannot be trusted. They have created this mess. We will do our best to get Victorians out of it. Victorians deserve so much more.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:16): I remember a time when a member of the opposition would present a matter of public importance (MPI) to the house and more than nine people in their party would turn up, especially for a huge economic announcement. Where are they? Where is the support? Where is the excitement? Where is the aspiration? Where is the vision? Is it in their offices? I do not know. I am pretty sure though that there is not much support for this. I do not think there are too many people watching at home, but –

Juliana Addison interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: That speech set my soul alight – it really did! I certainly value transparency in management, which is what this debate is about. I think they are broad concepts that, while we often talk about them in a financial or economic sense, do not start there. They start with good leadership, with good outcomes and with honesty. For me, management would be about how bodies organise their workflow, how they help members of their body achieve goals, working efficiently and effectively together pragmatically. I believe transparency means that you can actually keep your team in the loop, no white-anting, and sharing the good and the bad and honest feedback both to and from yourself as a leader. I guess I am really shocked standing here, I am absolutely flabbergasted, by the irony of this debate today about transparency and mismanagement, because there is only one party in Australia that are fighting each other in court right now. Literally MPs from the opposition are going to court and testifying against each other, all the way to the Federal Court. This has got to be a historic low in Australian politics.

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Look you can interject, but you are not going to emancipate yourself from the mess that you are in right now.

The SPEAKER: I would ask you not to refer to 'you'; it is a reflection on the Chair.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: Well, the financial mismanagement – $3 million-plus on a defamation case in the Federal Court, member for Point Cook. I think that kind of explains it all. So the opposition today want to actually talk about principles of transparency and principles of mismanagement, and that shocks me because that would be the last thing that I would like to speak about if I was embroiled in the Federal Court at the moment in an argument, which to me is based at its very roots, at its very foundation, on a lack of transparency, on a lack of honesty and on a lack of good management in their own party. Literally while we speak here lawyers and barristers are being paid because a Liberal Party MP is suing the opposition leader for defamation, which is –

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Frankston to be very careful about sub judice.

Paul EDBROOKE: I am well aware of sub judice, and I will skirt around that, thank you, Speaker. I think the case has unwittingly documented the Liberal Party's internal chaos at the moment and an intentional lack of transparency and an intentional lack of good management.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the matter of public importance is very specifically around the financial mismanagement and lack of budget transparency of the Allan Labor government. It does not go anywhere near what the member is currently debating.

The SPEAKER: There are words in the matter of public importance that refer to budget – budget – transparency**.** I would ask the member for Frankston to come back to the MPI.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the member for Lowan, too, because I actually did not realise I had 15 minutes. I thought I only had 10. I am so glad I took notes.

I do like transparency. I like transparency quite a bit. Let us give a bit of context to this. Secretly recording your shadow cabinet colleagues – is that transparency? Is that good management?

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: No. The Federal Court heard of recorded meetings –

Emma Kealy: On a further point of order, Speaker, this goes to my initial point of order, which was that this is a very narrow matter of public importance related to budget transparency and financial mismanagement.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan is correct –

Emma Kealy: As per your previous ruling, I ask you to bring the member back.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Lowan. I would ask you to state your point of order succinctly. Member for Frankston, it is a pretty narrow MPI. I ask you to come back to the MPI.

Paul EDBROOKE: I will continue talking about transparency and good governance, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: It is budget transparency, member for Frankston.

Paul EDBROOKE: We have got an opposition here today with a record of terrible management, terrible clarity and transparency on matters –

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Well, in 2014 under a Liberal coalition – I am pretty sure it was the Napthine-Baillieu-Shaw government that hid Ambulance Victoria response data. I am pretty sure it was our government that released it.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Nepean!

Paul EDBROOKE: We released that data from Liberal captivity. How is that for transparency? We were not the government that, just prior to an election, signed secret side letters on the east–west link. That is another example of transparency that has got a lot to do with the state's finances. I think today the irony is thick across the board. In fact I cannot even believe that this was made up as an MPI. I thought we would go somewhere else a little bit less embarrassing.

It has come to my attention, too, that only recently – and I make no allegations against any MPs here – the Hawthorn RSL sub-branch has expelled a former Liberal candidate over allegations that veterans' data was actually shared by the Liberal Party, and Hawthorn sub-branch members received political communications –

Jess Wilson: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is a very narrow MPI, and I am not sure how this relates to budget transparency in any way, shape or form.

The SPEAKER: No, I am not sure either, but I do hope the member for Frankston is coming back to being relevant.

Paul EDBROOKE: I am on my way there. I am giving context. The RSL disputes tribunal found this Liberal guilty on several charges –

James Newbury: Speaker –

Paul EDBROOKE: and it is in their DNA.

James Newbury: Speaker –

Paul EDBROOKE: Wait till the member for –

James Newbury: Speaker –

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, you do not need to screech at me.

James Newbury: I am not screeching.

The SPEAKER: Order! I would ask you to just stand in your place. I will see you, and I will call you. The Manager of Opposition Business has a point of order.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member has repeatedly used this matter of public importance to sledge. This is not the grievance debate.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: I would ask you, on relevance, to bring the member back to the motion.

The SPEAKER: I would ask you to state your point of order at the start of your point of order. Member for Frankston, I would ask you to come back to the MPI and to tie in what you are saying, right now, to the MPI.

Paul EDBROOKE: We have seen that the opposition is very, very, very touchy today about this, and I would like to just give a bit of context about where we are coming from.

We had a plan after COVID to make sure that the state's economy was in a place where we could generate the economy, and at the moment we are on track to be, in five years, the highest growing economy in Australia. The first step of that plan was creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring growth. The second step was returning to an operating cash surplus, the third step was returning to operating surpluses and step 4 was stabilising debt levels. You can add step 5 to that as well, which was reducing debt levels as a proportion of the economy, which we have seen in the latest budget that came out.

For the first time since 2017 net debt to GSP has dropped. That shows that the MPI we are talking about today is the thought that you can rock the boat and then tell people that you are the only people that can save them from a stormy sea. That is what we are seeing here today.

I think the issue for those opposite, much like their internals, is the way the public sees them. When we say 'matter of public importance' –

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, I would ask you to implement the rarely used mercy rule and sit the member down.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Paul EDBROOKE: Well, bearing that in mind, I can talk about a former member for Kew, former shadow minister, former person at the centre of the operation that you have got over there in the opposition. In the *Age* that former MP said this:

> What voters want to see and hear from the opposition is basic competence. Broadly speaking, they also want to know what you stand for. The Victorian Liberals have failed to show these attributes for years – that's why they continue to lose.

John Pesutto interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: I am taking up that interjection. I will just remind the Leader of the Opposition of Sue Chrysanthou, who said the project that the opposition leader presented was no better than a project presented by an eight-year-old. So –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, we were speaking about sub judice earlier, and the member is specifically quoting a current court case. I would say that the member in terms of relevance and the sub judice rule is skirting on very dangerous ground, and I would ask you to caution him.

The SPEAKER: Member for Frankston, I remind you about sub judice and I also ask you to be relevant to the MPI.

Paul EDBROOKE: What we are seeing is that the rebound in Victoria's economy has been strong and a testament to the resilience of the Victorian people and the economy we built together and how we worked together through COVID, through some very, very difficult times. Even when we had people who were working against our economy, we spent money to save lives. We achieved step 2 in that plan by delivering an operating cash surplus in 2022–23, and that is forecast to continue in the 2023–24 budget as well and beyond.

We remain on track to meet step 3 from 2025–26. In fact we will deliver a higher operating surplus in 2025–26 than we promised before the 2022 election. The 2024–25 budget delivered on step 4, stabilising net debt as a percentage of average GSP, and due to achievement of step 4 we added a new step, step 5, reducing debt levels as a proportion of the economy. So that 2024–25 budget projects net debt to GSP to peak at 25.2 per cent in the 2027 budget and then decline to 25.1 per cent in 2027–28. And in the Victorian budget in 2024–25 for the first time net debt to GSP has dropped since 2017.

I think what we are seeing today is what the Liberal Party are all about. There are more of them here to listen to me and have a little go, have a little shout, than there were to listen to their own Shadow Treasurer, who has made a massive announcement today, apparently. He has got his book. He said he wants to table it. It is fantastic; thanks for holding that up. But what we see is there were nine opposition members in the chamber, and now there are, with the former speaker, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12 – 13 for me! I mean, I know I am a much more charismatic speaker –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance – and I am hesitating because I know I am just helping the member for Frankston out, who cannot fill his time in – clearly counting is not –

The SPEAKER: Member for Frankston, come back to the MPI.

Paul EDBROOKE: For me I think it is really an exemplar to be standing up here and be shouted down by the Liberals, because obviously they do not want transparency. They have not told us what they are going to cut. So you can come out with a plan – what is the first thing that is going to be cut? Is it health? Is it education?

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Did you say my weight? Is it health? Is it education? Is it people's housing? Are you not going to allow people to build homes next to their loved ones?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition!

Paul EDBROOKE: We know that this is your plan, and we would love you to come out in a transparent fashion and tell us about it today. I would love to hear that from the next speaker. It is one thing to have a plan; it is another thing to tell the Victorian community what is the first thing that is going to be cut. Whose jobs are going to be cut? Who has to go home to their family and say, 'Right. We are in trouble because of a Liberal government.' It is fine to say you have got a plan. We have heard nothing about it, and that comes to what this debate is all about today: mismanagement and lack of transparency – none and none.

Unfortunately, Victorians know that we have a shambles in opposition at the moment. They cannot trust each other. They record each other secretly. How can the Victorian people trust this mob when they do not trust themselves? How can they run a state when they do not trust themselves? How can they run the state's finances transparently and in a manner befitting of a government when they act like this?

I thank the opposition for coming in to hear my contribution – I really do. I think we have got 15 people in here now versus, say, nine for the Shadow Treasurer and his announcement – very, very entertaining to see that happen. I am sure that I did not disappoint. I am a charismatic speaker. But this matter of public importance is based on fallacies, and it is based on sheer stupidity.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:31): The member for Frankston asked a rhetorical question about what we would cut. I think the first thing we should cut is a statue to someone that put us in the world's longest lockdowns. The first thing we should cut is a statue to someone that drove this economy into the ground here in Victoria and has left us with nearly $200 billion worth of debt, and that same person started this.

I am glad the member for Frankston reminded me about the east–west link. Someone said it was not worth the paper it was written on. It must have been gold-plated paper, because it cost Victorian taxpayers $1.3 billion to get out of that contract, and that is where this whole mess actually started. So thank you, member for Frankston, for drawing attention to the fact that this government cannot be trusted to manage Victorians' money. It started from day one when we when we spent $1.3 billion to not build a road that is desperately needed. If you go out on the Eastern Freeway, as I do sometimes in the morning, and see all those cars banked up coming in, they would not be banked up if the east–west link had been built when it should have been built.

This is about the issue of fiscal mismanagement and budget transparency, and it starts with the current Premier and the Commonwealth Games. In 2018 we were told – particularly regional Victoria was told – that we could have the Commonwealth Games, a regional Commonwealth Games, that would see our regional cities benefit. That dream was kept on life support until after the 2022 election, and then it was actually euthanised because the government had no intention of actually keeping that dream alive. They just wanted to keep it past the 2022 election so they could then scrap it. It was originally going to cost $2.6 billion. Somehow magically over a few weeks it went from that – because the now Premier kept saying everything was on track – to $6 billion to $7 billion, which has never ever been quantified.

For those that follow the Commonwealth Games, they will have to now pay to go to Glasgow to watch Victoria's money actually fund the Commonwealth Games. How is that actually benefiting Victoria when Victorians' taxpayer money is actually paying Scotland to run what was going to be our Commonwealth Games? I do not know what map they were looking at, but on the last map of Victoria I looked at, Glasgow was not in regional Victoria, but somehow now it is deemed in regional Victoria because they have got our money to run our Commonwealth Games.

The project that, again, the current Premier absolutely, totally stuffed up was the Murray Basin rail project. It has not been raised in this house for a while because the Premier is very touchy about this. She inherited $400 million of money to run that project. Michael McCormack, the federal minister,

when it was first botched put in another $200 million to bail that particular project out – $600 million to have the train from Merbein actually go to the Melbourne port in a slower time than when it started.

How can someone spend $600 million to have a slower train to do that particular issue? What makes it actually worse, at the end of all this we have spent $600 million, and we actually have a train that goes slower between Mildura and the port, and the Premier put her hands up and said, 'This is an issue for a future government to fix up my mess. I can't fix it up.' That is putting the white flag up on regional Victoria and on the particular project. So we now have slower trains and we now have more trucks on the road than necessary – more road damage – and that is just an absolute travesty. The same Premier that we have now oversaw all the major infrastructure projects in Victoria – $40 billion in cost overruns. Forty billion dollars is a number that most people struggle to get their head around because there are a lot of noughts in it.

Can I break it down to some simple terms for the house? As the Minister for Roads and Road Safety at the table would know, there are 23,000 kilometres of highway in Victoria, so you could spend a million dollars on every kilometre of highway in Victoria and still have $17 billion left over. That might just help fix the health system – actually it might just help us get an ambulance on time. We might actually be able to give the police, those very hard working police, a pay rise, and you would probably still have the odd million or two left over to do some other things around the state. That is the context of what those cost overruns mean. We could have had a million on every kilometre of highway in Victoria to fix them up so we would not have those people damaging their wheels, bursting tyres and doing all the things that happen on potholes. The Melba Highway is not in my electorate but is one of the worst roads you could ever drive on when it comes to highways – that could actually have a million dollars on every kilometre and be fixed. So for the minister for roads at the table, if the Premier had not blown $40 billion on the major projects in Melbourne, the minister would have had a great budget to fix all the roads. But it was not to be, so Victorians are paying the price for Labor's mismanagement of those particular projects.

We come to the debt that the Shadow Treasurer talked about. As he said, in the 2 hours we will spend on this particular debate in the Parliament we will rack up another $2 million of interest, so for every hour that is $1 million in interest, and the next hour, $1 million – every day, every week, every month, every year into the future. That million dollars – give it a few hours and you could build a new school in your electorate or my electorate. Go for a couple of days and we could build a hospital. It is amazing what could be done with that money that is being spent on those particular projects. Again, the Premier was transport and infrastructure minister. For the Bendigo to Echuca train line there was federal money – thank you, Darren Chester, who was the minister at that particular time – of $93 million to upgrade that line. The trains were going to run faster. When you used to come down on the train, where it runs parallel to the road, the cars would pass you. I came down a few Sunday nights ago to come to Parliament, and guess what, the cars still pass you on that road, even though there is $93 million being spent on fixing up that particular line.

Danny O'Brien: Allegedly.

Peter WALSH: Allegedly. When it comes to the issue of the health system – the transparency around the health system – the fact is that all our health systems are extremely nervous about the fact that there will be budget cuts, there will be service cuts, there will be staff cuts and there will be some form of mergers. Whether they are called networks, whether they are called alignments, whether they are called wheel and spoke or whatever they are going to be called, there are going to be mergers. The CEOs and the leaders of those hospitals are effectively on notice: 'Don't talk to the opposition and tell them what is going on.' If you want transparent government, as employees of all the taxpayers of Victoria they should actually be telling their communities what has been going on. But they have been read the riot act: 'Don't talk to the opposition; don't tell people what is going on.' There will be staff cuts or there will be people that will leave that will not be replaced, which is an effective staff cut. There will be service cuts, and people in country Victoria will have to travel further for health services. What is even worse is with the funding that is there, if someone wants to go get their hip done in a

regional hospital, that hospital will actually get paid less to do that surgery than if they are in a metropolitan hospital.

Why should country surgeons get paid less to deliver a service?

Juliana Addison: They don't.

Peter WALSH: They are. It is a fact. Perhaps the CEOs of the hospitals have been told not to talk to you too. They probably have been told not to talk to you too. Through the Chair, Speaker, perhaps the CEOs of those hospitals have been told not to talk to the relevant members in their particular electorate.

What we want to see on this side of the house, which the Shadow Treasurer talked about, is we want to make sure that there is transparency in the government process. We want to make sure that there is accountability in the budget process. More importantly, we want to make sure there is an intergenerational report on how all this debt that we have inherited – or are going to inherit in November 2026 – will actually be dealt with in the future. We want to have a Victorian version of the Productivity Commission that will actually drill down into the debt, will drill down into how government is run and will actually give us, as an incoming government, advice as to how to manage it into the future. Because Victorians deserve better than what they have had over the last 10 years. Nearly $200 billion worth of debt and a million dollars an hour in interest bills is not good enough. People will rue the 10 years of Labor and two more where that debt will go up and things will get worse before there is a change of government here in Victoria. Everywhere I go – and I recently spent two days at the Elmore Field Days – the constant question of people coming into the tent is 'When are you going to get rid of this corrupt, tired, out-of-ideas government?' Those people that raised it said, 'We've had enough of this, and we need change in Victoria.'

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (16:41): I am delighted to rise to speak on this matter of public importance. I am delighted that the Leader of the Nationals wanted to discuss the east–west link, particularly when we are talking about matters of transparency. When Ted Baillieu stood for election, he talked about honest reporting and accountability to citizens about the things government is doing on their behalf. Within seven years he had completely destroyed that with a decision to hide the costs of all major infrastructure projects. Let me just remind those on the other side that the Auditor-General – the Auditor-General that this side respects and listens to – condemned the former Victorian government's handling of the east–west link road project. The audit examined whether the state had effectively managed the project by assessing the total costs. The Victorian Auditor-General's report found that Napthine government's decision to proceed with the project and enter contracts was based on flawed advice. So you want to bring up the east–west link and you want to talk about transparency – well, you have got it right there. The Auditor-General said that there was a lack of transparency.

Baillieu announced a policy which said they would no longer disclose the cost of major projects. Those on the other side like to say, 'Oh, you know, this was 10 years ago. It was a long time ago.' But let us remember that the cabinet under Napthine included sitting members Kim Wells, David Davis, Matthew Guy, Michael O'Brien, Peter Walsh –

The SPEAKER: Order!

Michaela SETTLE: Correct titles – I could not remember all of their seats.

The SPEAKER: Correct titles, member for Eureka.

Michaela SETTLE: I appreciate that. But what I am trying to say here is that there are many on the other side that sat with the Napthine government and the Baillieu government when they decided to no longer disclose the cost of major projects. In fact the then Treasurer, the member for Rowville, said that the project budget had the potential to limit competition by giving potential businesses a reasonable indication of the government's estimate. The member for Rowville was very happy to

suggest that the government hide the costs of projects. So while we are talking about transparency, please hold onto that dearly.

I would go on to say that they are announcing today what they claim are going to be measures for transparency and accountability. Let us look first at the charter of budget honesty that is being proposed. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia whose budget is required by legislation to be signed off by the Auditor-General. So what we are not sure of is whether those on the other side are suggesting that the Auditor-General is not good at financial management and how we operate.

While that might seem harsh, let us remember that is something that the predecessors of this opposition have certainly done. The friend of the current Leader of the Opposition Jeff Kennett was famous for trying to get rid of the Auditor-General altogether. Those on the other side in those days did not have much respect for the Auditor-General, they wanted to change it so that there would be no transparency. During his stint as the Auditor-General in 1996 Mr Baragwanath found the Kennett government's misuse of government credit cards, secrecy surrounding Victoria's private prisons and – another cracker – the use of commercial confidentiality to conceal the sale of public assets and government spending. While our interim Leader of the Opposition might like to spout that he is going to bring in some sort of charter of budget honesty, he is at the one hand going down the same track as his good friend and financier Jeff Kennett, who sought to curb the Auditor-General. I can only imagine that this step is one to curb the Auditor-General.

Another one of their fine ideas today is around debt caps. I find this one pretty extraordinary. Let us have a look at the only jurisdiction that does it so publicly, which is the US. There have been 78 different times that they have legislated to raise the limit. So basically it is a dysfunctional system, but I would also say if they would like on the other side to hold up America as some great bastion I would suggest that their debt caps would probably lead to something akin to the US health services. Debt caps just want to appease a set of figures with no respect or understanding of the impact that they will have on the budgets. Our health system is far and away in advance of America's, but those on the other side seem to want to introduce something that has failed in America, given that there have been 78 instances where they have had to pass legislation, and they would like us to bring in a flawed service here. So the debt cap is a pretty dysfunctional idea – which could also be said of the opposition in general. The charter of budget honesty would seem to be another lech to take power away from the Auditor-General – as I say, akin to the financier and friend of the temporary Leader of the Opposition, Kennett, who sought to remove the Auditor-General's power through legislation in 1997.

All round, what we are looking at here are some pretty strange ideas, pretty empty ideas, many of them that have been debunked. As I say, the debt cap is ridiculous. With the idea of the honesty charter, we already have the Auditor-General. They talk about waste, and yet they want to create other levels of scrutiny, which would imply that the scrutiny of the Auditor-General is not up to scratch in the opposition's eyes. They are pretty ordinary ideas, but at the base of all of this of course is they like to tout tax cuts, and I think it is incredibly important that we remember that what we do with tax money is we spend it on services. Whilst they were all very quick to shriek that they were going to cut waste, let us face it, they are going to cut services. The last time they were in every single solitary budget included cuts to housing – that is what those on the other side would like to do. They will cut supports for the vulnerable in our community to ensure that people that own Airbnbs, for example, can make a bit more money out of their Airbnbs. That is the sort of tax cuts they are looking at.

And do you know what? Do you know where the money from the Airbnb levy is going? It is going to housing. So they can stand there and tell us they are going to cut out those taxes, but basically they are going to cut a tax that supports housing for the vulnerable and also by cutting it they will be protecting their very own, who are reaping in the bucks with their Airbnbs.

We look at this announcement from them today – we look at this MPI – that they want to talk about lack of budget transparency and mismanagement. The papers are all there. We had decades of lack of transparency from the Liberals and the Nationals. The few times they managed to get into government

basically their colours showed. They cut all of the services for the general community while protecting their mates from taxpaying. They have got some pretty weird ideas about a debt cap, which has absolutely failed in America, and a charter of budget honesty, which would see the Auditor-General sidelined, because basically the problem over there is they do not understand the system. As I say, we are the only jurisdiction that goes through the Auditor-General. But would you like to see the Auditor-General curbed?

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

Michaela SETTLE: Sorry. They would like to see the Auditor-General's powers curbed, obviously, as did Kennett in his attempts back in 1997. I can only imagine that is the plan behind their charter of budget honesty, which is another dud.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (16:51): I rise to speak on the member for Sandringham's matter of public importance today:

> That this house condemns the financial mismanagement and lack of budget transparency of the Allan Labor government.

From the outset can I say that Labor cannot manage money and Victorians are paying the price. But our commitment to the Victorian people is the Victorian Liberals and Nationals will better manage Victorian taxpayers money.

Can I start with debt? From those opposite today, in the contributions from those opposite, we have been looking back in time 10-plus years or 20-plus years, but let us look at the here and now of what Victorians are actually facing in terms of Labor's mismanagement under the Allan Labor government. We have had $40 billion of cost blowouts when it comes to infrastructure projects in Victoria, and let us just look at a few of these infrastructure projects. The North East Link was promised for $5 billion, then revised to $10 billion and then revised again to $16 billion, and last year the Premier came out and overnight announced another $10 billion blowout on the North East Link. On the Metro Tunnel there was a $4 billion blowout before the $888 million latest blowout under the Allan Labor government. Of course there is the West Gate Tunnel, where we have seen a $4.7 billion blowout. These have all been overseen by the Premier as the Minister for Major Projects and Minister for Transport and Infrastructure for a decade under this government. The Premier has sat around the cabinet table and personally overseen every single blowout under the Allan Labor government. Each one of these major project blowouts has contributed to net debt increasing year on year in this state – $188 billion of net debt by 2027–28. This is the largest debt of any state in this country, and Victorian taxpayers will be saddled with an interest bill of $26 million a day by 2028. That is more than $1 million each and every hour each day that Victorian taxpayers are paying for Labor's financial mismanagement.

I asked the Premier in question time today: what is the interest bill today and each and every other day here in Victoria? The Premier could not answer the question. She did point me to the budget papers. Well, I point the Premier to the budget papers – the budget papers that she signed off on. Each and every day, for the Premier's reference, Victorians are right now paying $17.8 million in interest payments.

Now, we know that Victoria's debt is not very attractive to buyers. We know that the cost of Victoria's debt is going up constantly, and that is because of the reckless management of the Allan Labor government and the reckless waste that we have seen under this government.

Previous speakers have pointed to the Premier's oversight of the Commonwealth Games debacle. This was a project that was promised for $2.6 billion on the eve of the election. It was promised to Victorians – particularly regional Victorians – that this was going to come to a town near you. Victoria was going to take on the Commonwealth Games for $2.6 billion. Yet last year in July we saw the Premier and the former Premier come out and say that the games had blown out to $6 billion to $7 billion under the now Premier's oversight. Victorians are now footing the bill – $380 million in

compensation – to pay for the Scottish Commonwealth Games to be held in Glasgow. This is an absolute debacle, and unfortunately for Victorians it is just one example of their consistent economic and financial mismanagement.

We talk about debt and we talk about the $188 billion of debt in this state, but we do not talk enough about the consequences of debt. What does debt mean? Of course it means that Victorians are paying an interest bill – an interest bill that continues to rise – and because Victoria's debt is so unattractive in international markets and here in Australia when it comes to the bonds market, the cost of that debt, the cost of those interest repayments, continues to go up. But if we look at the impact and the consequences of debt on our health system, earlier this year we saw that hospitals here in Victoria are actually running low on cash. For the financial year to January, 41 of the state's 75 health services did not have cash supplies to cover operating expenses. Such cash flow problems mean that health services have to pull funding. They have to pull funding from essential support services, and they have to not fill vacant positions. This is simply because the Treasurer and the Premier cannot manage Victoria's budget, and that is now flowing through to the fact that our hospitals do not have the cash flow to manage their own operations, putting Victorians' health at risk.

If we turn to the education system, the education system is underfunded, it is overcrowded and of course we know it is short-staffed. In this budget we saw 29 unfunded school upgrades listed in the budget. Despite commitments made on the eve of the past election – commitments made right across the state – students in primary schools and secondary schools here in Victoria have been left without those much-needed capital upgrades because of the mismanagement of this government, the rising debt and the inability to fund those projects. We know the education minister here in Victoria has gone cap-in-hand to the federal government saying, 'Please, please, Minister, fund our state schools more because we can't afford to do it here in Victoria.' Our state schools here in Victoria are the least funded compared to most jurisdictions in Australia. They have the least funding compared to other states when it comes to state government's responsibility to provide 80 per cent of that funding. And of course we are seeing teachers leave the profession in droves – a 5000-teacher shortfall over the coming years – because this government cannot manage projects and they cannot manage money, and Victorian students are paying the price.

Finally, let us look at Victoria's credit rating. Do not just take my word for it that Victoria's debt is causing many issues here in Victoria, the consequences of which I have just spoken to, but let us turn to the credit rating agencies that have downgraded Victoria's rating to the lowest in Australia. In recent times they have put stark warnings out to the government to say, 'You need to get your financial management under control. You need to make sure that you are reining in spending and that you have a plan to stop debt growing in this state.' We have had Standard & Poor's warn that they could downgrade Victoria's credit rating even further if financial mismanagement is not put at the top of the government's agenda. We have had Moody's talking about the fact that interest payments are forecast to be too high by 2028, when net debt is projected to hit $188 billion.

What these rating agencies have pointed to is the fact that while this government talks about a debt repayment plan and a debt management plan, they still plan to build and put in place the Suburban Rail Loop, a project that is unfunded – a project that is going to cost over $200 billion and a project for which the first phase alone has already blown out from $35 billion to over $40 billion according to the Auditor-General.

The rating agencies have said if the government continues to go down the path of building the Suburban Rail Loop, then it is very, very possible that Victoria's credit rating will once again be downgraded. The government has not liked that too much, and so they have gone to a new credit rating agency Fitch and paid for a new credit rating so they could point to that rather than those of Moody's and Standard & Poor's, which have put out very stark warnings to this government to get their house in order and get spending and debt under control in this state.

The lack of budget honesty and transparency by the Allan Labor government is remarkable. We have seen Treasurer's advances time and time again. We have seen them grow from $365 million when the coalition was last in power to over $12 billion recently. These are Treasurer's advances for what should be projects and ongoing commitments within the budget that should be made very clear to the Victorian people. That is why today we have released a robust fiscal framework to put in place economic responsibility in this state to make sure that we are not recklessly wasting taxpayer money. We will make sure that we put in place a legislative charter of budget honesty. We will put in place a real-time public expenditure tracker so that Victorian people know how their money is being spent. We will ensure that we develop an intergenerational report so that future generations understand the consequences of Labor's record debt and the mismanagement of Victoria's finances.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:02): I too rise to speak on this motion and speak against this motion put forward by the opposition today. I am quite overwhelmed because I do not know where to start or who to start with. The type of nonsense that has been coming from those opposite this afternoon has been quite extraordinary, and I do find it amusing. I always have a laugh; I always find it amusing. It started there with the member for Sandringham, and I am so glad you have come back in the chamber, member for Sandringham, because you will like this one. You always give me the giggles. I am always impressed by your performances; you give it a great go. I sat there confused in the beginning as to why the Leader of the Opposition was not leading this matter of public importance as the first speaker and speaking for 15 minutes about this grand plan that he has for Victoria. That was not why I was laughing, member for Sandringham. I was laughing because I love hearing Libs talk about their values and how passionately they feel about them. They always talk about the people who have money in their back pocket and how those people deserve a fair go, and they do deserve a fair go. But that is where the plan stops and that is where the member for Sandringham stopped. They never talk about the rest of Victoria that may not have a couple of dollars in their back pocket and what their plan is for them. I have heard none of that today.

I listened to the member for Kew give her contribution this afternoon. I know that asking a question during question time can always be quite daunting. I think it was the Premier who responded to the member for Kew on this about a question of interest and debt and expenditure. The Premier responded with what expenditure in this state has been spent on, and I am going to remind you here this afternoon about what it has been spent on. It has been spent on our level crossings, and I am sure someone will shout out how many we are going to do and how many we are up to so far. I cannot keep count. There are so many. Victorians' money has been spent on removing those level crossings. The Werribee line is going to be level crossing free. I always like to throw in that little bit with the western suburbs – level crossing free.

A member interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: You say Melton is going to be level crossing free. That expenditure has been on things like –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I just think the member for Tarneit deserves to be heard in silence. There is a bit of audible noise in the chamber at the minute.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I am looking around for the member for Gippsland South, who I think has left. He would be used to me saying, 'Shh!' See how quickly it gets quiet in here? Victorians' taxpayers money has been spent on things like the West Gate Tunnel. That will open next year, 2025. Member for Brighton, I hope that you will have your GPS on and that you are one of the first ones to drive across. That will cut travel times by at least 20 minutes for westies – that is 40 minutes.

You guys talked about $40 billion of debt – or interest – and this will cut 40 minutes at least per day for westies travelling.

Let me keep talking about this expenditure. We are also spending money, yes, on the Metro Tunnel. That is going to open in 2025. That will benefit every single one of the folks living here in Victoria. That is an extraordinary project, an extraordinary investment in Victoria's growing population and predicted future population, which will be the size of London's in years to come. That is about building for our future. This is not just small stuff that has to be done. We are also doing that. The member for Kew also talked about how there is no money for school upgrades. Well, schools are being upgraded in my electorate. A lot of them, I have to say, have already been done, and there are still more underway. I was at Sunshine Primary School recently with the Premier and the Minister for Children to celebrate $11 million to completely transform one of the oldest schools in the western suburbs into a first-class facility where kids will get a world-class education. Right next door, well and truly under construction and well underway to open its doors for term one in 2025, is Sunshine Primary School kindergarten. A kindergarten – who would have thought? That is one of 50 onsite kindergartens that we are building at our primary schools – one of 50. So do not talk about taxpayers money not being spent on things in this state; that is absolute nonsense. There is the $1.8 billion western roads upgrade program, which upgraded many of the country roads in one of the fast-growing corridors in this state and this country, inside my electorate. The expenditure has been spent on stuff that matters.

The member for Murray Plains, the Leader of the Nationals, ended his contribution by saying that we are a government that has run out of plans. Well, I have to say, and I am going to say it – and I know everyone behind me will think, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's right; I told you so' – in case the Leader of the Nationals missed it, we have made major announcements every day this week about housing and how we are going to tackle Victoria's housing crisis. Maybe he missed that. That is not, as he was saying, a government that has no plans for the future. We are not stopping there. We have made announcements today about renters.

Obviously the Leader of the Nationals needs to get back to reading the *Herald Sun* or whatever newspaper he gets his information from to understand that we are a government that is making announcements each and every single day. But we do not just make them for folks in a particular part of town, folks who have a particular amount of money in their bank accounts or folks who come from a particular postcode; we are a government that is interested in governing for all Victorians. I would say to the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite: that is why you sit on that side of the chamber and that is why we sit on this side. It is a little story I like to tell on election day about what you believe in, the society that you want to raise your children in. Do you want a government that is going to govern for all Victorians and fight for a fairer, more equitable Victoria, or do you want folks that are just interested in how much money they have in their bank account?

Members interjecting.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Apologies, member for Nepean. It is just that that the member for Sandringham is busy doing something else.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind the member that 'you' refers to the Chair as well.

Luba Grigorovitch: I think the member for Laverton is doing a great job.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Thank you, member for Kororoit. The member for Kororoit would know that her electorate has benefited immensely from the type of infrastructure that Victorian taxpayers money has been spent on. There is not one punter on the street that you could stop that could not name one project that this government has undertaken that they have benefited from, and for folks in the western suburbs, it is going to be the West Gate Tunnel. That is one of my favourite projects.

In the short time I have got left I am not going to go through the full list of things that we have invested in, but what I will say, which has not been mentioned in this place and I cannot finish my contribution without pointing out, is the budget is in the position it is in as a result of really tough decisions – and I was around for those tough decisions – that our government made four years ago when we faced one of the greatest challenges to our state in our history.

A once-in-a-generation global pandemic came onto the scene, and our government chose to do the right thing: it chose to prioritise saving lives, protecting jobs and supporting local businesses, supporting those local businesses that those opposite continue to talk about time and time again in this place as though they are the only ones that support and represent those businesses.

I still remember those times and the debates we had in this place. I like to think it is blurry and far away, as it may seem now, but I remember the daily press conferences, and I remember the enormous sense of pride I felt when Victorians banded together, did the right thing and kicked COVID out of Victoria. For two years we fought this thing while Victorians put their community first, got vaccinated and did the right thing to get things back to normal. We supported local businesses who were doing it tough, and yes, it did cost a lot of money. The amount of times we have talked about that here in this place and being in the position we are in and our four-step plan to get out of it, and those opposite deny it as though it never happened.

There are a lot of deniers here in this place. Member for Nepean, you were not here and maybe you did not hear them – there were a lot of deniers on your side of the house when it came to the COVID pandemic. But the Treasurer has worked tirelessly to get things back on track, and I would ask those opposite to start telling the truth about stuff. Stop fearmongering in our community about this situation. That is really why you are sitting on that side and not this side of house. This is a ridiculous motion to bring up at this time, this week, to debate as an MPI topic, and I strongly speak against it.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (17:12): I rise today on this matter of public importance moved by the member for Sandringham:

> That this house condemns the financial mismanagement and lack of budget transparency of the Allan Labor government.

This Labor government have blatantly neglected Victoria, including the Mornington electorate, through their absolute financial mismanagement, lack of budget transparency and disastrous budget earlier this year. Debt is now approaching $188 billion. Taxpayer-funded interest on this debt will soon be $26 million a day; that is over $1 million every hour, and it is also over $180,000 during this 10-minute speech that I will give right now, which is more than most family incomes. There is an undeniable need for funding for basic service delivery; however, because of the Allan Labor government's culture of reckless waste and blowouts they are not providing the much-needed services and investments we need. Hundreds of constituents are contacting us requesting that Labor fix our roads, like in the member for Mildura's electorate in places like Robinvale or with potholes and craters in some cases which are now everywhere, with infrastructure, public transport, schools like the 50-year-old Mount Eliza Secondary College, hospitals like Rosebud Hospital in the member for Nepean's electorate, local sporting facilities and much more; you name it.

Surely it is clear to any sensible member opposite, if there are any, that Victoria has been neglected and many are not better off than they were 10 years ago when Labor first came into government, despite the mental gymnastics and budget opaqueness that Labor try to engage in. Victorians are now suffering under what will soon be 23 out of 27 years of Labor in power in Victoria, power that seems to have gone to their heads. The member for Frankston before asked about what we would cut in government. How about this? Cut waste, cut taxes, cut red tape, cut corruption, cut unemployment rates, cut the amount of potholes, cut ambulance ramping, cut debt. These things have all gone up under Labor. Maybe the member for Frankston has seen the light – he has joined our side of the chamber right now – has seen the light that this Labor government have overseen debt, corruption and more.

Now let us go to this debt, something that is increasingly a barbecue conversation – Victoria's Himalayan levels of debt. As noted, Victoria's debt under Labor is skyrocketing towards $188 billion. Some people have described the debt as a mountain, yet this is unfair as there is no downward slope and no distant peak. Instead we will potentially have generational debt that will be difficult to pay down.

And who do we have in charge of the state coffers? A Treasurer with the air of a kid who has just been given his mum's credit card to go to the shops to purchase a few basics but returns with 5 kilograms of chocolate, packs of lollies and a brand new Hot Wheels set. A Treasurer who has doomed this state to its current parlous financial circumstances. A Treasurer who says, 'What money? What debt?', and puts it all on red, because that is exactly what the Treasurer is doing. He argues:

> … as your economy grows, your capacity to service your liability massively improves.

That is obvious. It is obvious to all of us. But our economy has been pumped prime by record levels of government spending and waste. So this Treasurer says, 'To service the debt, spend more money.' Yet experts say that the only way the debt stops rising in dollar terms is by running cash surpluses, and as the member for Sandringham, our Shadow Treasurer, would attest, there are no operating surpluses forecast in the next four years, with revisions since the budget only making the bottom line worse. Labor in response has tried to tax its way to prosperity, with 55 new or increased taxes. We have seen increased land tax, schools tax, holiday tax and more. Increased taxes will only push our economy backwards. Increased land taxes see rental providers sell up and invest elsewhere, reducing rental stock, pushing up rents and making it even harder to secure stable accommodation for so many individuals, couples and families.

On the back of this we have over 61,000 people on the public housing waiting list, increasing levels of homelessness and more. Indeed, on the Mornington Peninsula we now have the fourth-highest level of homelessness in this state, and that includes people like Kon, who are now homeless, living in their van on the Frankston foreshore, as the member for Frankston is aware, due to Labor's and the member for Frankston's lack of bailing out of Culcairn Drive residents, who have been victims of Labor's failed building regulations.

In contrast, if we were to reduce taxes, such as reducing land tax, people would flock back to invest in Victoria and, ironically, we would raise government revenue. The Allan Labor government is increasing taxes while at the same time cutting essential services like road maintenance, with a 45 per cent cut to the road maintenance budget since 2020, and hospital funding. Where, for example, is Pakenham hospital or, as I mentioned before, Rosebud Hospital's much-needed redevelopment? As well, there has been recklessness and reckless use of taxpayer funds, like with the $40 billion of cost blowouts on major projects, or their white elephant, the $216 billion Suburban Rail Loop.

As mentioned, growing debt and interest has meant Labor introducing over 55 new taxes and charges, driving businesses and jobs out of Victoria. As the member for Sandringham pointed out, over 152,000 Victorian businesses closed in 2022–23. I know the member for Frankston is aware of all those closed shops in Frankston right in his electorate.

Victoria's new business registrations have also flatlined in comparison with other states. This also means the government has less to spend on schools, hospitals, roads, public transport, tackling crime and more. This includes the Mornington electorate. My electorate has seen little in terms of funding for the environment, public transport, crime prevention and enforcement, schools, homelessness, roads and more from this state Labor government, all because of their financial mismanagement combined with their disproportionate expenditure on Labor- over Liberal-held seats, such as we see with education infrastructure funding. We are also seeing negative real wage growth, and the Allan Labor government has no plans to address it.

Also on crime, due to Labor's financial mismanagement we are seeing cuts and more cuts to tackling crime and ensuring community safety, such as with the 1000 police shortage we have at the moment. In Labor's budget, this included an $11 million cut to community crime prevention, a $466 million cut to emergency management capability, a $34 million cut to youth justice custodial services and a $37 million cut to prisoner supervision and support.

This means less funding, resources and support for police, including Mornington police, making it very difficult for them to tackle the increased crime wave on the Mornington Peninsula. This,

combined with a reduction in reception hours for police stations across Victoria – including Mornington police from 24 down to 16 hours across multiple days each week – and weak bail laws and consequences, means police need to keep arresting the same offenders over and over again, which is simply demoralising for them and the community.

In December of 2023 the Mornington Peninsula was reported as one of the state's top five youth crime hotspots. This has since got worse. On the weekend a *Herald Sun* article showed aggravated burglaries are up by more than 17 per cent, vehicle thefts are up 30 per cent, stealing from shops is up more than 70 per cent, and overall crime on the Mornington Peninsula is up 22 per cent over the last 12 months. Victims have been left scared due to the increasingly brazen activities and actions of criminals. Victims are afraid to go home or be home, and children are having nightmares about intruders. Concerned constituents continue to contact me about this increasing issue.

At the same time, in contrast, the coalition today announced a legislated charter of budget honesty, a real-time public expenditure tracker and a Victorian first intergenerational report to be completed by a newly established Victorian productivity commission. In short, we will be more transparent, we will lower taxes, we will cut waste, we will cut red tape, we will be very careful with our spending, we will reduce debt, we will grow investment and we will grow our economy. We cannot trust this Labor government and we need a change.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (17:22): Of course I am going to contribute to a matter of public importance (MPI) moved by the member for Sandringham. The member for Sandringham is in the house.

Brad Rowswell: What story are you going to tell today, mate?

Nick STAIKOS: Hello, member for Sandringham. I know you love it when I tell the stories from our days at St Bede's. The member for Mornington just said that this MPI is barbecue conversation. What sorts of barbecues does the member for Mornington attend? But it got me thinking. It is pretty weird, really; it did get me thinking. Imagine a barbecue with the member for Mornington, the member for Nepean, the member for Sandringham and the member for Brighton. Who else has put their hand up for the leadership? The member for Rowville, the member for Berwick and the member for Bulleen – John would not be invited. Did you notice, though, that there were not any women mentioned?

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, could you bring him back to the MPI?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the debate has become rather a wide debate. I thought you might have said 'correct titles', which I would have upheld.

Nick STAIKOS: The previous speaker was talking about barbecues. Those gentlemen will be flipping the sausages. There were not any women mentioned as potential future leaders – they will be inside cutting salads and sipping moselle no doubt – because that is their attitude.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, could you please bring the member back to the debate?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am sure the member is coming to the relevance of the MPI before us, and as I said, it has become rather a wideranging debate in the last hour. The member is to continue on the MPI.

Nick STAIKOS: I am responding to the previous speaker, who was talking about barbecue conversations. I thought I would lean into that given the trouble they have had, particularly over the last couple of months, on that side.

But considering this MPI, I have got to say the lead speaker, the mover of this MPI, the member for Sandringham, said, 'We care for vulnerable Victorians.' My experience of Liberals is that they only

care about themselves – nobody else – and there is a mountain of evidence to demonstrate that they only care about themselves. As we speak, they are busy opposing new housing in their electorates.

Sam Groth interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: Listen, member for Nepean, you may be all right on a tennis court; you are not that good here, let me tell you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Nick STAIKOS: But I will say to the member for Sandringham that he cares for vulnerable Victorians as long as they do not live anywhere near him.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, that is not very nice. I am personally offended by that, and I seek an immediate withdrawal.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the member withdraw?

Nick STAIKOS: No, I do not.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would encourage the member to withdraw given that personal offence was taken, apparently.

Nick STAIKOS: For the benefit of the house, I withdraw. But I think there is a mountain of evidence to demonstrate that they do not care about vulnerable Victorians. They pay lip-service; that is all they do. I spoke about this yesterday on the housing legislation. The member for Sandringham actually has an opportunity in his electorate, with the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) beginning in his electorate, to welcome in many, many, many young people who will be able to set up their homes in the Sandringham electorate. The member for Sandringham lives in the area in which he grew up, yet he wants to deny that opportunity to many other young people. Why does he want to do that? He has been spending the last month running around not just opposing the Suburban Rail Loop but opposing the housing that is going to come with the Suburban Rail Loop.

I spoke about this yesterday. He is opposing high-density housing on the Highett Gasworks site. The Highett Gasworks site is on Nepean Highway. It is between two activity centres. It is not just going to be on the Frankston line, it is going to be on the Suburban Rail Loop, connected to the largest jobs hub outside of the CBD. It is between two industrial precincts. So if you cannot actually put this sort of higher density housing in that location, where can you put it? Where? This is the trouble we have got. When you say you care about vulnerable Victorians, you are demonstrating that you just want them to live out on the urban fringes or that you really do not care if they have got a roof over their heads. That is what we hear time and time again.

The member for Sandringham also pretended to be concerned about people's wages. The fact is, without the labour movement there would not be a minimum wage. Let us call a spade a spade: if we did not have unions, if we did not have a labour movement, if all we had were the Tories opposite, there would be no minimum wage, there would be no 8-hour day, there would be none –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: Gina Rinehart did have something to say about that, member for Point Cook. But there would be none of these protections for workers. So if ever you hear a Liberal say, 'We're worried about people's wages; we're worried about wage stagnation,' they are not genuine, because they do not believe that Victorians should have decent wages.

The other thing I would say about those opposite is that they care very little about intergenerational inequality. They care very little about what Victoria is going to look like in the 2050s because, as I said at the start of this contribution, Liberals only care about themselves. The reason why those opposite oppose this government's efforts to secure the future of Victoria, to secure the future of Melbourne, which by 2050 will be the size that London is today, is because they do not – we will all

be retired from politics by the 2050s, yet on this side of the house we care about what Melbourne and Victoria will look like in the 2050s. We are building for the future.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: Rowville might still be here, but the rest of us will not be. I can guarantee that – the rest of us will not be. That is the difference between this side of the house and that side of the house – we care about what this state and what this great city of the world will look like in the 2050s, and more to the point, we care about the opportunities that Victorians will have in the 2050s.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Narracan!

Nick STAIKOS: Centre Road in Bentleigh, is that right? Have you ever been to Bentleigh? I do not think you have.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Nick STAIKOS: Member for Narracan, in my electorate we have the SRL structure plan and we have got the Moorabbin structure plan.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bentleigh, through the Chair. Member for Narracan, stop interjecting.

Nick STAIKOS: My electorate is going to do its fair share. I am not worried about more housing in my electorate, let me tell you – unlike the member for Brighton, unlike the member for Sandringham and unlike a number of those opposite.

Because there is actually a greater good here that we need to strive for, and that is to ensure that we are building for the future. All of these major housing announcements that we have seen over the last couple of weeks and all of the major infrastructure that this government has invested in over the last 10 years are all about the future.

They have opposed every piece of that infrastructure agenda. They opposed the Metro Tunnel. In fact they shelved it for four years when they were in government. They opposed the level crossing removals. Georgie Crozier was marching up and down Centre Road, Bentleigh, collecting signatures on a petition against the level crossing removals in Bentleigh. What a genius move – opposing the West Gate Tunnel. Now they are opposing the Suburban Rail Loop. For the last 20 years I have either been a local councillor or a local MP. When we talk about new development people say, 'Where is the infrastructure?' We are building the infrastructure, and we are building the housing above the infrastructure. We are builders on this side of the house; they are blockers.

As for barbecue conversation, I reckon they are such a divided rabble on that side, let me tell you. They all hate each other. They are all leaking on each other, and they do not even need to leak anymore. It is open hostility. At the moment they are just the opposition. The Leader of the Opposition does not have control of his party room, and if he were ever to be Premier, he would not have control of his government.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (17:32): I rise to support the member for Sandringham, the Shadow Treasurer, and his matter of public importance today that the house condemns the financial mismanagement and lack of budget transparency of the Allan Labor government. When you talk about barbecue conversation, member for Bentleigh, I would be very curious about what conversations members on that side of the chamber have with people outside of this place, because we get very, very caught up – when you sit around with your friends –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Sam GROTH: When you sit around with your friends and have a discussion about the current state of Victoria, how on earth do you say to them that us being $188 billion in debt is a good thing? How do you honestly sit there and have that conversation and say $188 billion of debt is a good thing? As the Shadow Treasurer said in his contribution, we are paying $17.8 million a day in interest as it currently sits, rising up close to $26 billion in the forward estimates. How can those that created the mess that we are currently in be trusted to be the ones that are going to fix it? How does taxing anything more make it more affordable, cheaper and better for the public? The answer is it does not.

The member for Eureka is no longer in the chamber, and she had a lot to say about the Victorian Auditor-General. I do remind members on the other side of the house, including the member for Eureka, that the Victorian Auditor-General had plenty to say about this government's handling of the Commonwealth Games earlier in the year, and it is very, very relevant to the MPI on which we are speaking today. The member said they accept everything that the Auditor-General says, which I am going to say is absolute bollocks when you hear the next comment. The Victorian Auditor-General said the costings on the Commonwealth Games were overstated and not transparent. The Leader of the House, the Minister for Health, in reply to that said, 'I do not accept the premise of that.' You cannot on one hand say you accept what the Auditor-General has to say and what a fantastic job they do and then not accept the findings of the Auditor-General.

Victorians are paying the price for the mismanagement of this government. They will continue to pay the price for the mismanagement of the finances from this government for a long, long time. The member for Bentleigh said that we do not care about vulnerable Victorians. Member for Bentleigh, just yesterday in the chamber I raised an issue about public housing; community housing; the needs of the homeless, which the member for Mornington touched on, on the Mornington Peninsula; and the fact that there are more than 400 current public and social community housing dwellings that are sitting empty through either not being maintained or the stock not being accounted for. Is it because they cannot afford to keep the stock? Is it because they do not care about the vulnerable people on the Mornington Peninsula? Is it because even though we are part of metropolitan Melbourne we are outside of the tram tracks and we are outside of the areas that are represented by the Labor Party? We do not have trains. We have minimal public transport. We do not have a hospital that is currently meeting the needs of our community, which is an older community.

We are not seeing the investment in our roads, in health. We are seeing no investment on the Mornington Peninsula when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable and those that need it. When you talk about supporting the vulnerable, maybe look just for once outside of your own seats.

We know Victoria is broke. State debt is projected to climb to $188 billion. Interest payments, as we said, are up over $20 million a day. We need to make sure that this government is starting to make some sort of financial contribution, a sensible contribution, to actually paying down some of that principal debt. We have continued to hear today from many members about a once-in-100-year pandemic that has put us in the current situation that we are in. Well, when you talk about a one-in-100-year pandemic, when your debt levels are $188 billion and only $30 billion of that is related to COVID, how do you explain the other $158 billion of debt? Not a single member on the other side of the chamber has had an answer for a long, long time, including the Premier today in question time, about where that debt has come from, how they are going to pay it and what the interest payments are.

In my electorate recently – I will say I thank the Minister for Outdoor Recreation and Minister for Environment for coming down and having the discussion on drownings, because it has been a huge issue. Something my community has put to the minister and to Parks Victoria is to put life rings onto piers. It would make sense. Let us put life rings on piers and stop the drownings that are happening. We were told that there is currently not the money or that it is not financially viable to put life rings on piers because of the ongoing cost of when they get stolen and the maintenance. It is not seen as a priority or seen as being financially viable. I would have thought, with the number of drownings in my electorate recently, that putting life rings on piers at the small cost of $100 a ring would have been an easy task to take on. You just question, because of the current financial mismanagement of the state,

is something like that, which is genuinely going to save lives, such a burden on the state's finances that we cannot even look after that?

We heard this week from the government a whole range of announcements, like removing stamp duty for properties. Well, once again, the people that created the mess cannot be trusted to be the ones to fix it. Back in 2017 this government removed those stamp duty concessions that were there not for 12 months but to help all of those Victorians that wanted to buy a property, and now the solution is that they are going to go, seven years later, and remove those again. You cannot be trusted to fix the mess that you created.

We heard also this week that Victoria is open for business. I might be wrong, Shadow Treasurer, but you tell me: when did we close? When did Victoria close up shop for business?

Brad Rowswell: Ten years ago.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair!

Sam GROTH: We have been closed for 10 years, and now all of a sudden we have a Premier – who has been here for 12 months, who has not been able to step out of the shadows of her predecessor, who has not been able to define who she is as a Premier – who has all of a sudden used the September break to come out to try to redefine herself. She is going to redefine herself with opening up for business but not cutting any business taxes, not cutting any red tape for business, not doing anything to bring business back to the state and not picking up the phone, like we have seen other premiers around the country do who have been chasing business away from Victoria. You cannot just put out a press release or go and do a press conference and say 'We are open' without genuinely having some sort of policy around how you are going to make that happen. You cannot do it without actually having a policy to do so.

Let us talk about road maintenance: budget cuts to road maintenance are absolutely horrendous. It is something where when we talk about them in those barbecue conversations I would struggle to think that there is a single member in this chamber who has people coming to them talking about how fantastic the roads are in Victoria. The member for Laverton mentioned the fantastic project, she said, the West Gate Tunnel. It might have been a great project at $4.7 billion, but when it has blown out to $10.2 billion, more than double the cost of the original project, you have to question the government's ability to manage the finances, to manage major projects – and it is not the only one.

There is a long list of projects where this government has continued to show financial incompetence and absolute mismanagement when it comes to it. The Metro Tunnel – blown out by more than $10 billion. The mentioned West Gate Tunnel – more than $5 billion. North East Link has blown out by more than $10 billion. Level crossing removals – well, we can argue those – are $5 billion over budget. The Suburban Rail Loop, originally costed at around $35 billion to $50 billion, is now looking at over $200 billion. And a project that the Victorian people actually want, airport rail, is now being pushed out to 2033. You all scoff about airport rail – it is probably going to be one of the biggest projects for Victoria to get people to and from the airport. You are going to go and build a new convention centre out in Geelong, which we have debated here recently. How are people going to get there?

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Sam GROTH: Well, there is one member on the other side of the house who agrees that it is a project that should go ahead – it is the Deputy Premier.

So if you cannot manage major projects, if you cannot manage timelines and you cannot manage budgets, how can you stand in this place and try and convince Victorians that you are the people to get us out of the mess that you have created?

A member interjected.

Sam GROTH: It has been touched on – the Commonwealth Games has been touched on, and I will touch on it very, very quickly in my last 30 seconds. $600 million was wasted for an event that will not go ahead. I tell you what, they spent $380 million in compensation and more on the cancellation – up to $600 million – to send an event to Glasgow. Australian athletes will have to go over, compete away from home on foreign soil in a reduced games, all because this government cannot manage money, they cannot manage the budget and they cannot be trusted when it comes to fixing Victoria.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:42): I tell you what, I wish the opposition would not talk down our magnificent state. We have so many wonderful businesses – small businesses, large businesses, exporters, importers – and they are so happy to talk them down, which ultimately is not good for those businesses. I am sure they do not appreciate them discrediting the wonderful businesses that contribute to our great state.

But just getting started, anyway, let us look at these debt caps. I did see the little, I think it is a three-slogan thing that they have got going, which is their magical solution to everything that they believe Victoria needs. So, debt caps. They are calling for a debt cap, and what is that really? What is that code for? That is code for cuts, cuts, cuts. And I would really like to know what they are going to cut and what frontline services they are going to compromise.

If Victoria had a debt cap, we would not have been able to use the state budget to protect household budgets in a time of crisis. Now, I know they never believed in the pandemic. They never thought anyone was ill or dying. They never thought about the poor medical professionals and the nurses that were working around the clock. That was never important to them, and I remember because I was in the upper house, where the constant repudiation of any of the skills of any of our medical profession was a continuous theme. It was absolutely disgusting, but it was all because it was just so inconvenient. But unfortunately – or fortunately – health is actually really, really important for human beings, so making sure that we are there as a government to support people in times of need is actually significant and recognised. If we had had a debt cap, this would have meant no rapid health response, putting lives at risk; no business support – they claim to be the party of small business, but if they had a debt cap, how would you help business – costing Victorians tens of thousands of jobs; and no economic recovery packages, slowing the recovery and exacerbating the pandemic's impact on jobs.

That is what a debt cap actually means. It might sound like a snappy little slogan, but what it actually translates to is hurting your own community, particularly in times of crisis, in times when they need government to back them in. And we know from the US experience exactly what a debt cap results in: cuts to vital public services and extended government shutdowns. I mean, it is hard to fathom. We have all seen those shutdowns in the US and public servants not getting paid. This is just ridiculous – yes, and public servants being furloughed, I should say, and not paid. Furloughed and not paid – that is what it means. Not paying nurses, police officers and teachers is not the Victorian way.

So you cannot just make that little slogan without attaching the inevitable consequences that would flow from making what I would call a blunt instrument. It may flow and it may resonate with their base, with Young Liberals, I do not know, it might sound really sexy or something. But for the real world, for the Victorian community that we care about deeply, we have to think about the consequences of these kinds of slogans and what it would actually mean for them.

They did make an official announcement. I really hope they are not going to go down that track, but it seems like they think that is the cure-all. Looking at the spending tracker, and I wonder if the opposition leader can name a single, comparable jurisdiction with a real-time public expenditure tracker. No. There might be a reason for that. I should say, our state publishes quarterly financial reports, much like many public companies. There has been no suggestion that these are deficient. Is there any single public company that does the same? Does the lack of examples perhaps indicate that it is just a porous idea and a poor use of taxpayer funds? Just putting it out there. Well, know one else is doing it and your record is not great when it comes to cuts, and I will get to that a bit later.

Now the charter of budget honesty – a nice little tagline. I will give you something for the tagline.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Nina TAYLOR: Sorry, with respect, Speaker. Victoria is the only jurisdiction in Australia whose budget is required under legislation to be signed off by the Auditor-General prior to publication. I did hear the previous discussion on that, but we could flip that around because there are two questions that flow about this charter of budget honesty and inferring that the current system is not meeting their requirements. Is the Liberal Party impugning the honesty of the Auditor-General and their ability to ensure the budget is a fair and accurate representation of the state's accounts? Because you cannot have it both ways here.

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: Well, no, because you are saying that the Auditor-General is not enough. You are actually impugning them with –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: No, that is exactly what you are saying.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Nina TAYLOR: Sorry, with respect. Or do they simply not understand the existing legislation, the role of the Auditor-General and how financial management operates in Victoria? Just putting it out there, because if you are going to put out the slogan, you have got to own all that flows from that. You cannot just –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: I know, we all use social media, and I respect that. You have got to do quick little grabs, but beyond that we then have to unpack what that actually means for the Victorian community and what the Victorian Liberal Party is implying about the capacity of the Auditor-General to do their job. It is a little bit unclear, and they might want to clarify that position at a certain point in time.

The other thing that I was going to say, because there is so much that could be said on this topic – oh I am getting to 3 minutes. Anyway, what about jobs? We have created more than 850,000 new jobs since November 2014 through our investments to support the economy – so government investing in our community, because that is what services do. If you cut them, actually jobs can get cut. The member for Kew said in this place that governments do not create jobs. This is correct, but only when applied to her side of the chamber. I did not hear much from those opposite prior to the last election when the federal coalition projected Commonwealth gross debt would reach $850 billion. Did not hear anything from them then. That is okay though, that is fine. That would equate to about $40,000 per Australian. It is interesting, there is a bit of different standards for different folks, but in any case, the opposition managed to only create 39,000 full-time jobs in their entire four years in government. Of course having a job is really important if you are to have disposable income to be able to buy things, so this is why we are support Victorians.

And I should say just as an example I was thinking of Starward, which is a wonderful distillery in Port Melbourne.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes. They produce world-class products. I was down there a few months back when they won some fantastic awards. Not that I am a whisky drinker myself – I am really not – but I have heard it is absolutely fantastic from reliable people. We provided grants to help businesses like them, and also to help train up other distillery providers around the state so that they have the proper occupational health and safety and other skills to make sure they do it safely but also can deliver a quality product for the community. So that is the circle. That is where government can be really helpful

when it comes to generating the economy but also helping businesses in our great state, which they cannot wait to talk down every second that they get the opportunity to do so.

In terms of delivering, I was thinking about my local electorate. We have got the wonderful St Kilda Pier redevelopment, which is coming along really well. Again, this is great for the local economy because it actually draws visitors. It is not only for locals. It is fantastic for locals, but also international visitors. So these are the kind of investments – and also protecting those dear little penguins as well. I just have to put that in there; that is obviously of paramount concern – just saying.

Metro Tunnel – absolutely fantastic. It is just a game changer for our state, literally untangling the loop, so to speak, and actually creating so many opportunities for people whether they are going out to the outer suburbs or coming into my area and into the city et cetera. It frees it up, because you know to get from A to B, the faster you can get there, the better off you are. On that note I commend the MPI – or our argument, anyway.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:52): I do not generally believe in mercy rules in sport, but gee whiz, we could have called one in then. Penguins! Let me address a few things first – the unemployment rate. We will talk about jobs. The member for Albert Park got hung up on that for a little while. Victoria has had the highest unemployment rate for six months running. There are all little bits of information –facts, not just information, facts. Some will take what works for them and leave what does not.

The other thing I want to address straight off the bat is the member for Bentleigh's contribution. He referred to the member for Mornington's barbecue quip – what is barbecue conversation? The member for Bentleigh might be served very well by attending a few social barbecues. And I will not say I got personally offended because I do not offend easily, but I did note that he said that the men would be out there flipping the sausages whilst the women are inside making the salad. Now, I would hazard a guess, given that I have been shown nothing but the utmost respect by the men on this side of the house since I got into this place almost two years ago, that if I asked any man on this side to make a salad, he would.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members on my right.

Jade BENHAM: See – I just think for that side of the house that talks about gender equality, misogyny and male chauvinists, I am not even quite sure what that was. But gee whiz, I mean, double standards.

Anyway, let us talk about other double standards. There has been lots of talk from that side of the house today about waste and what would – no, sorry, they are not talking about waste; they are talking about cuts and 'What are we going to cut?' First of all probably a few of the backbench is what we are going to cut, and then it will be waste. The member for Murray Plains spoke about not having a statue for someone that put this state in the dire economic situation that it is in. When we talk about Victoria being open for business –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The level of noise!

Jade BENHAM: what an absolute load, to quote the member for Nepean, 'what an absolute load of bollocks.'

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Point Cook is not in his chair.

Jade BENHAM: I was one of those small business owners that was put out of business during COVID, and that is one of the reasons I am in here today. So do not tell me that Victoria is open for business. Those of us that live in border towns can see every day businesses leaving the state in droves. But you know what is really sickening about this?

They will go over to New South Wales – because they can, it is right over there – because there are no major hospitals in the northern part of the state. On the New South Wales side, within safe distance, they live and work and set up their businesses, paying tax revenue to New South Wales, meanwhile sending their kids to school in Victoria. They are using our hospitals and our healthcare system – so they are using all of our public services – meanwhile that tax revenue, because they cannot do business in Victoria because it is too hard, is all going to New South Wales. And do you know why? Because it is much easier to do business over there than it is in Victoria. Not only that, the member for Lowan and I border South Australia. Again, we can see them jumping the border to South Australia. I mean, come on – South Australia. I do not even want to visit there, but my husband's business operates out of South Australia because it is so hard to do business in Victoria. The member for Mornington made a really good point about barbecue conversations; it would serve members on the other side very well to just go and have a chat to people at a barbecue, go and have a coffee with them, hang out and actually talk to real people, because those of us that live in the real world and have done for most of our lives understand the landscape of business and what communities are going through. We understand it better, obviously, than those on the other side.

When we talk about the lack of budget transparency, when we are hiding budget contingencies and we are not giving $76 billion worth of contingencies, when we are paying, what, $17.8 million dollars in debt today – you give me three months and that builds an entire new Mildura base public hospital, which we desperately need now. You give me one day and there is an extended emergency ward. We are so desperate, because all of those people in New South Wales just on the other side of the river who have left because it is too hard to build, too hard to develop and too hard to do business are coming to our emergency room. That kind of waste is what we will cut, and that is what this announcement today was about – budget transparency – because, you know what, at the end of the day real people who live in the real world just want a bit of honesty. They want to know where their money is being spent. They actually want to know that.

Might I also add we need gas for barbecues, even if they are inside. We need gas for that, and you need to be able to turn them on. But there is a culture of reckless waste and budget blowouts, and that has been made abundantly clear. Two ears, one mouth – they should be used in that order. The government actually needs to listen to the real people and talk about and listen to what the real people are saying, because Victorians are paying the price for Labor's financial mismanagement every single day and they will be for generations – my kids will be, my grandkids will be, my great-grandkids will be. That is what this announcement is about today. It is skyrocketing – it is out of control – and for those on the other side to talk about how things are all smiles and rainbows is ridiculous. Member for Murray Plains, let us go back and talk about the Murray Basin rail project. That was a few years ago now, where $600 million was wasted on the Murray Basin rail project so that we now have a longer train that takes longer to get to port then we started with. That does not make any sense. Surely common sense at some point has got to prevail, but I fear those on the other side do not even know how to spell it, so we are going to be waiting at least another two years for that to occur.

There are so many things that you could talk about when it comes to financial mismanagement. We could talk about the 55 new or increased taxes. What I have spoken about in droves this week are those like Indulge Apartments, who are an operation who manage apartments in different locations. They own them. They are short-term executive-style apartments, and they are going to be slugged with a 7.5 per cent increased tax. They are worried. Those of us in tropical north Victoria have a booming tourism sector, and people like Sarah and Simon Cox, who run Indulge Apartments, are really scared. This is a small business.

Business is just so hard, particularly small business in this state, and I know that firsthand, because the poor policy decisions of the Andrews Labor government and now the Allan Labor government are exactly what put me and many like me out of business during COVID and post COVID. Guess what? They do not care. When you have got over 150,000 businesses closing down, that is not 'Victoria is open for business'; that is 'Victoria is shutting down for business' so that the Allan Labor government

can have a say in everything. What people actually want is for the government to get out of their way so they can just live their lives. Right now we are in incredible financial debt. We are in dire straits, and it is all because the Labor government cannot manage money. Victorians are paying the price, and they will do for generations. I commend the member for Sandringham on this matter of public importance.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (18:02): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, which will improve how Victorian schools are regulated and run. I welcome the opposition's support for this bill, because it is, as the member for Sandringham said in his contribution, a very commonsense and sensible bill.

Like so many people in this chamber that have contributed to this debate before me, I too would like to pass on my love and support to the Auburn South Primary School community following yesterday's tragedy. I offer my deepest sympathies to the principal, teachers, support staff, students, families and everyone impacted by the incident.

As a former teacher and proud Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania member, I would like to thank all the educators across my electorate for their commitment and contribution to high-quality teaching and learning and the huge investment they make every day to support students across Ballarat. Speaking from experience, the job goes well beyond the classroom door and the end-of-the-day school bell, and our government knows this. That is why we are proud to be supporting breakfast clubs, free glasses for kids, prep bags and of course our wonderful Smile Squad. I want to also send my very best wishes to the year 12 students undertaking their VCE exams, particularly the wonderful year 6 students who I taught in 2018 before being elected to this place. They are now completing their schooling, and I cannot wait to see what is next for them and the pathways they pursue.

Our Minister for Education is an excellent minister. He is taking on the portfolio and all its challenges with every ounce of energy and determination, and we are seeing this in the reforms that are coming across. I would really like to thank the Minister for Education, his outstanding ministerial office and the Department of Education, as well as the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions for their efforts in bringing this bill to the house in consultation with stakeholders. This has included the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, which I will refer to a number of times throughout my contribution, the VRQA, whose powers will be improved by the proposed amendments. This bill also includes other educational authorities such as the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the Victorian Institute of Teaching and the new Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership; education boards, including the Adult, Community and Further Education Board and the board of AMES Australia; the Department of Justice and Community Safety regarding updates to particular penalties; and educational peak bodies such as Independent Schools of Victoria and the Victorian Catholic Education Authority.

I am dedicated to ensuring that students at all levels, in Wendouree and across the state of Victoria, have continued access to quality educational opportunities that deliver strong educational outcomes. I recently had the opportunity of joining the Minister for Education at Ballarat Specialist School to celebrate the opening of new buildings at their Gillies Street campus, which was made possible thanks to a $10 million investment by the Allan Labor government. Ballarat Specialist School is just one specialist school amongst every other specialist school across the state that we are investing in and improving. We are also locally funding facility upgrades at the wonderful Forest Street Primary School, which I am going to be opening too on Friday, as well as building a wonderful new senior centre at Mount Rowan Secondary College in Wendouree.

More than two dozen Catholic schools in regional Victoria will also share in $103 million to build, expand and modernise their facilities, including the beautiful school in Wendouree, Our Lady Help of Christians. We are getting a new Catholic primary school in Winter Valley, which will be so well received by the community, when you look at the numbers of people at Lumen Christi as well as at St Thomas More and Siena. The Allan Labor government also provided $2 million to support the construction of the magnificent St Patrick's College performing arts centre from the Non-Government Schools Capital Fund. This is why we are the Education State.

But there is more, particularly for our amazing teachers and school leadership teams with the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership in our beautiful new state of the art building in Camp Street, Ballarat, which provides our hardworking teachers and school leaders a place to do professional development and further develop their professional practice close to home. Previously they had to jump on a train to Melbourne and jump on a train home. We are shortening their day by about four hours, and they can do all their training right in the heart of Ballarat.

Why are we introducing this bill? We are doing this because we want to ensure that our schools are regulated effectively, and this bill today proposes several amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act of 2006. Together these will work to update the powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority, the regulatory body for Victorian education and training providers; as well as to improve the regulations surrounding work experience arrangements, thereby easing the administrative burden on our very hardworking principals; and finally, to clarify and standardise other provisions across the act.

One of the core purposes of this legislation that we have before us is to address the VRQA's ability to act in instances where schools are suspected of operating while unregistered. At present the VRQA may engage and request information from organisations suspected of breaching registration requirements. However, in cases of suspected noncompliance, prosecution is often the only option available. This is a resource-intensive process, which should be the last option, not the primary option. With the proposed changes to the VRQA, the VRQA will be empowered to compel the production of relevant documents and information from suspected unregistered or unapproved providers. Individuals and bodies that require registration or approval by the VRQA may include those operating a school, a school boarding premises or an educational and training organisation, as well as those providing senior secondary qualifications, specific courses to overseas students and student exchange programs.

Under the new framework the VRQA may issue a notice to produce to gather evidence necessary for identifying organisations operating in breach of regulations. They will also have the option of issuing a notice to comply to those which they reasonably believe are operating without the required registration or approval. In cases of noncompliance with these notices, the bill also provides for formal warnings as well as court-issued declarations, pecuniary penalties and injunctions, in addition to prosecutions.

At the same time this bill also proposes to increase the maximum penalties for conducting an unregistered school or school boarding premises. Currently this sits at 10 penalty units, equating to less than $2000, which is inadequate as a deterrent and insufficient to justify prosecution. The proposed penalties are better in line with comparable offences with a maximum of 120 penalty units for an individual and 600 for a body corporate.

By increasing penalties and therefore better incentivising registration, in addition to broadening the VRQA's ability to compel information this bill will further ensure that Victorian schools are providing a quality education to students in our state, which we would all agree is what is most important.

The bill also further clarifies the information-sharing provisions in the act and removes the onerous expectation for requests to be made in writing. The VRQA may share information with specified persons or bodies such as government departments and agencies, public sector bodies and municipal

councils. This will facilitate important communications concerning the performance of educational entities. The proposed amendments will not substantively change the scope of this information sharing but will rather clear up potentially confusing elements within the current provisions.

Whilst I was going to go into procedural fairness and stuff like that, I did just want to mention the importance of work experience, which is another core improvement of this bill – how schools organise work experience and structured workplace learning placements. My daughter Johanna, who is in year 10 this year, had a fantastic opportunity to do work experience at the Ballarat art gallery. It really opened her eyes to creative industries and future pathways into creative industries in Victoria, and that is what work experience is all about. Over the last six years I have welcomed the opportunity to have work experience students spend a week in the electorate office and here at Parliament, although I do feel that often I learn more from the students than they learn from me in those weeks. I look forward to welcoming another work experience student next month and really encouraging their love of civics and the important role of Parliament and government.

Currently our hardworking principals are personally required to make these arrangements, which can impose a substantial administrative burden. The proposed amendments lay out an alternative where a principal may nominate another member of staff to take on this responsibility instead, which is really important for building relationships with careers counsellors and encouraging vocational discussions with students. In closing, I welcome the introduction of the bill and commend it to the house.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (18:12): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. But before I do, as I think nearly every speaker has done, it is appropriate for us to reflect on the extraordinary sadness that I think has enveloped the conversation we are having about education today in the context of Auburn South Primary School. I think we are seeing the best of ourselves and the best of each other when we do stop and reflect on what education means and how educators are reflecting on the impact that such a tragedy has. For that school community and Auburn High School, which is directly opposite Auburn South Primary School, it is going to ripple across our community, because a young person has lost their life in tragic circumstances.

I do want to commend this house and the way people are acknowledging that and using this bill to just stop for a moment to reflect on how we can make sure that we are acknowledging this pain that is experienced. I commend not just the Leader of the Opposition but also so many people on our side who have got that very close connection to the Hawthorn East community. It has given us pause for thought, and it has also given me pause to reflect on the role that principals play in so many ways.

I was very pleased to follow on from the member for Wendouree, as one of the many educators we have who has made a contribution on this bill, and I know you, Acting Speaker Walters, also made a terrific contribution and have a very important role in informing all of us about the role that education has in making sure that we are responding to disadvantage.

I do always take the opportunity to reflect on our principals. I know that I personally often call my principals when I am trying to make sure of those elements of social cohesion that we need to be alive to in a really complex world. They are the people I turn to and often call first and just check in with and see if there is anything additional that we need. I am often surprised at their insight, but also they often provide some information that I had not thought of or reflected on. I often jokingly call our schools the village well, because of that role that they play.

Back to this bill – of course I am pleased to hear that the Liberal–National parties are not opposing this thoughtful and commonsense piece of legislation.

I do want to, though, just quickly make a rebuttal as a point of debate in response to the member for Eildon's contribution wherein she reflected that the curriculum was overfull. I do note that it is not the role of members of Parliament to set a curriculum, because if I were to set a curriculum and those opposite were to set a curriculum, or the Minister for Veterans at the table, I imagine we would have

very different ideas on what the values are, and not just that but what the best approach should be to educating our children. I am not an educator. There are some people in here who are, but I know that as a government we allow experts to advise, and we listen to experts. That was just a quick pointer as well to the previous debate on the matter of public importance. We have to listen to experts and reflect on how they advise governments, so I did just want to get on the record that that is important for us to reflect on.

This bill actually gives me a wonderful opportunity to first of all congratulate the department, the ministerial staff and the Minister for Education for bringing forward a piece of legislation that will make the lives of principals easier. Many of us as members of Parliament take on work experience students, and the thought that there was an onerous additional administrative burden that fell to principals when we could perhaps legislate to allow others to take that on in our very busy school environment is a very welcome change for our principal class.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I am going to take the opportunity to perhaps reflect on the extraordinary, fresh perspectives and enthusiasm that have inspired me when I have taken on work experience students. Not only have I had topnotch work experience students who of course are typical of the topnotch students of Cranbourne, but two of them have been school captains. I think it is no coincidence that they might have done work experience with me when they were in year 10 and they have gone on to be school captains at their respective and different schools, but they are also just completing VCE. I am going to start by saying how terrific Vassou Karshal and Iman Hadari were – both are school captains of their respective schools and both right now are deeply conscious of the exam tasks ahead of them. It was always wonderful to have these clever, sparkling and thoughtful students in the office. But with those two I have really enjoyed watching their growth. Sarah Moore, Olivia Prasad, Asher Chu, Lakshi Laurenston, Sarah Brown, Oslim Corick have all come from a rich tapestry of backgrounds that has really reflected the culture of Cranbourne, and they have brought their unique perspectives to our team. I think others have also acknowledged that although they came in to do work experience in my office, we learned so much from our students, not just the burst of enthusiasm that they brought, but also the way that people from a young generation think about things and the knowledge they have about the community that they live in is well worth listening to.

The quite-young staff in my office often set them up a project. The key focus of their work experience is to work on a project that is aligned with their interests and to the community. Then they make a proposition to me and put the proposal to me, and these are topnotch proposals. They also really help my office with constituency support. With their authority, constituents sometimes are willing to allow our work experience students to sit in on meetings as we work through how to support them with whatever issue it is, recognising that when they are work experience students we have to be mindful of the types of issues. Office administration – these students have been involved in really important daily operations. They have all had a day in Parliament, and they have all particularly enjoyed the social media content that they have provided to me. Initiatives like this legislation are going to make that type of process easier for our school principals.

I am going to make sure that I do acknowledge and recognise the school principals in Cranbourne. Rob Duncan is at Cranbourne West Secondary College. I was there only last week because we are putting in some fantastic three-storey modular classrooms, and that is all really exciting. It is a four-year-old school. There is Michael Sweeney, Cameron Heath, Garry Rolfe and Ros Carlson, who is one of the people I often call when I need to think about how to resolve a complex problem. Lachlan Yeates was the first person to take forward any opportunities for his students.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Chris Murray, Liam Mara and Liz Davey are at one of the other brand new schools in Cranbourne. Adriana Allen, Tina Clydesdale – I get the opportunity to thank Sally Webb, who is finishing up her

role – Christian Woodcock, Ben Vivas, Fiona Williams and Chris Black at St Peter's, with Julie Banda and Jeremy Wright, who is the reason my daughter is a teacher because of the role he played in my own daughter's education, Michelle Brooksman, Jacob Matthews and of course Lisa Vanderbosch – these terrific leaders are the lifeblood of our community.

I also have a brand new Catholic primary school coming on board next year, St Josephine Bakhita, named after a Sudanese saint. That will be a terrific addition. I do welcome Kathryn Pepper to the community and look forward to working with her as the principal of St Josephine.

Our future is bright with the extraordinary students we have in Cranbourne, the extraordinary students we have in Victoria. This legislation makes the role of educating and leading our educators so much clearer. But I do want to finish by saying that my oldest daughter as a schoolteacher is a source of great pride to me. The passion that she puts into the role – the care and consideration she has for the students in her care – is really emblematic and typical of what we see across the state.

Our educators are our future and our children are in safe hands. The future is bright, and I am very much looking forward to the passage of this legislation. I commend it and wish it a speedy passage.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (18:22): I too rise to speak in support of the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, and in doing so, with a little bit of indulgence, I would just like to convey the thoughts, prayers, sympathies and condolences of the Pascoe Vale community to the Auburn South Primary School community. The devastating events of yesterday are an absolute tragedy, which my community very much sympathise with, particularly for the young student who could not, sadly, be revived and for those students who remain injured in hospital. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with you all.

I would like to just also acknowledge and wish all of our VCE students all the very best as they kick off their 2024 exam season as of yesterday through the English exam. Whether students are aspiring to reach university or TAFE, join the workforce, start a business or do something entirely, entirely different – maybe have a break year – in wishing students all the very best I just remind them that VCE is not everything and that it is not the end. It is just the beginning, in fact, of a lifelong learning journey.

It is in that context that I now turn to the substance of the bill. In doing so I want to commend the Minister for Education on bringing this bill before the house, but also particularly the Minister for Youth, who is at the table as well, because just like the Minister for Education, she is also absolutely committed to supporting the health, wellbeing and socio-economic outcomes of all young people in our community. I thank the minister for having visited the Oxygen youth space previously in my community, which I was the proud founding advocate of many, many years ago now, and I look forward to working with both the education and youth ministers respectively to continue progressing those opportunities and outcomes across the north and north-west – and my parliamentary colleagues, including the member for Greenvale and others.

It has been since 2014 that the Victorian Labor government has remained absolutely committed to building the Education State, because we have long understood that education is the most important public investment we can make in our future. This Allan Labor government have set strong foundations for education in Victoria, and this bill builds on those previous reforms and initiatives that we have proudly delivered. Just some of those key reforms to touch on include phonics, updating our teaching and learning model to embed explicit teaching at its core, including the use of systematic and synthetic phonics; the introduction of mental health practitioners; the Schools Mental Health Fund; the doctors in secondary schools program; the $400 school saving bonus, with credits to hit family accounts later on this month; out-of-hours school care; the active schools program and so much more. Introducing free kinder for three- and four-year-olds of course is also a landmark reform that will continue to reap benefits for many years to come. There is also our record capital investment to deliver

the Education State, with $14.9 billion invested across the state to upgrade almost every school facility and resource across Victoria.

Fifty per cent of schools that have been built across the whole of Australia in the past 10 years have been built right here in Victoria by this government. This has included record investments for local schools in my community, particularly high schools, which I will touch on very shortly. This bill will build on those investments and those record reforms.

The bill provides the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority with sufficient powers to counter the increase of unregistered schools, which may not be providing high-quality education and a safe environment, and reduces the unnecessary administrative burdens caused by redundant and inefficient processes. The bill does make a number of changes and amendments to strengthening VRQA's compliance and enforcement powers to address gaps and inconsistencies in their powers and of course to reduce those unnecessary burdens. There are quite a number of reforms contained that are minor in substance but quite important in terms of the context of improving the capacity of VRQA's work. I refer to other members' contributions for the detail on those reforms, but fundamentally as I said this bill will help us continue delivering a better, fairer and more inclusive education system for local principals, teachers, students and families alike.

It is in this context that I turn to the release of my community's first-ever dedicated education plan. Secondary schools in Merri-Bek North are now joining forces to maximise student outcomes, engagement and inclusion thanks to our Labor government. The Minister for Education, the Deputy Premier, on Thursday 24 October – just last week – launched the Merri-bek North education plan after a thorough consultation and partnership-building process to identify community needs and the unique challenges and strengths of our school communities. The schools involved in the plan include Coburg High School, Glenroy College, John Fawkner College and Pascoe Vale Girls College. The top priorities identified in the Merri-bek North education plan are: excellence in teaching and learning, because we know supporting our teachers from the outset will be crucial to supporting those outcomes for young people; a greater focus on student wellbeing and inclusive behaviour and positive behaviours; as well as providing for a diverse and high-quality range of subject offerings and learning opportunities for all students regardless of which Merri-bek North high school they attend.

The consultation and engagement also found that students in the area need individualised support and pathways, which is exactly what the Merri-bek North education plan will deliver on. The plan will transform education in the area over the next 10 years, creating more opportunities for students and building stronger connections between schools and our local community. Schools involved will be able to share resources and expertise, giving students more opportunities to take classes and participate in activities that may not have been available to them previously. The plan will allow our local secondary schools to leverage their shared vision to establish strong partnerships with tertiary education providers as well as promoting vocational pathways in local growth industries such as advanced manufacturing, science, health care and education.

We will also continue to assess the buildings at each of these local high schools to ensure they continue to be up-to-date, maximising learning opportunities for all students. This will be supported – which I was very happy to see the minister commit to and announce – by a $50,000 update towards the development of the new master plan for Glenroy College, which will ensure the buildings at that school will also continue to meet the needs of the community.

These initiatives through the plan will build on that record investment I was referring to earlier that we have delivered since 2014 to upgrade all of our local high schools, including the $14.5 million towards John Fawkner College for a new science and visual arts building and a new food technology building and $17.8 million towards Coburg High School to deliver a new two-storey technology building, creating space for 250 additional students. We have just recently appointed the builders, and works are now well and truly underway at the school. There was $11.9 million towards Pascoe Vale Girls College to build a new arts and technology centre, which has been in operation since the start of term 4

and which we are officially opening later on this year. I would love to have you, Acting Speaker Walters, member for Greenvale, in attendance at that with the minister, hopefully. There was $9.2 million budgeted towards Glenroy College for their new senior and junior school learning resource centre, admin centre and staff hub, which is now well and truly open.

Our government recognises the unique strengths and characteristics of each of these local high schools across Merri-bek North, and this plan ensures our community proudly will have our localised vision for excellence and wellbeing in education for the first time over the next decade to come. By investing in and supporting our local teachers and offering that broad, engaging and diverse learning environment through the plan and improving infrastructure, we will be able to deliver on each of those outcomes over the next 10 years.

I particularly want to thank all those who were involved in and consulted in putting the plan together. The plan apparently had the highest level of feedback of any education plan that the Department of Education have conducted across the state, so quite comprehensive consultation and feedback has been incorporated. To all of the school communities, parents, families, students and stakeholders who participated I say thank you, and also to our local principals: Brent Houghton from Coburg High, Kay Peddle from Pascoe Vale Girls, Dr Lisa Vinnicombe from John Fawkner College and Andrew Self, the deputy principal, who is a Coburg North resident, and Andrew Arney, the principal of course at Glenroy.

As I said, underpinning all this will be the school staff, including the teachers, and implementation of this plan will occur in stages so that schools are not overwhelmed. Staff will have those opportunities to deepen their skills and benefit from the training and personal development as the plan is rolled out over the coming years. But I am pleased to say quite a few of those initiatives are already well and truly underway, and we look forward to confirming and announcing those over the coming months as they get finalised and as they roll out.

With the time I have, in the spirit of this bill, I would like to also congratulate the Pascoe Vale South Primary School community on having celebrated their 70th birthday last week. It was a pleasure to attend and cut the cake to celebrate, highlighting the Victorian Labor government's record $5 million-plus investment towards upgrading the school's facilities since 2014, the biggest level of investment the school has ever received in its 70-year history, with new classrooms, learning and indoor spaces, and a new school indoor multipurpose space. It was also a pleasure to highlight my ongoing support for the school's continued advocacy around the need for a new covered outdoor learning area, a COLA, with the school having collected a 1400-signature petition that I have sponsored and look forward to tabling here in Parliament I believe potentially tomorrow, and ongoing advocacy for a new 40-kilometre school speed zone on Coonans Road and the introduction of a school crossing supervisor, which I also encourage council to support. Commendations to Carmel Lancuba and the school community.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (18:32): It was wonderful to hear about the member for Pascoe Vale cutting the cake at his local school, because on this side of the chamber we cut cakes and on that side of the chamber they cut everything else. So I was glad to hear about the cake cutting. But what we did not hear about earlier today from those opposite was their policy agenda for education. We were subjected, shall I say, to 10 minutes from the member for Sandringham, a senior member of the Liberal Party and a named contender for leadership. He had 10 minutes to speak about education in this place, and he did speak about some numbers. He spoke about 825 – that was the bus route which he spent the entire 10 minutes talking about. When he could have been speaking about quality education for children, he focused solely on an issue with a local bus. I am sure it is an important issue, and I absolutely think all children should have access to accessible public transport to get to school. But what about the rest of the day? But what about the rest of the students' day at school? What about access to education? What about quality of education? What about support for children with disability to have the same opportunities as all students? None of these came from the lips of those opposite, because they simply do not have a policy agenda about education. They do not think about education

except when it relates to private school fees and payroll taxes. That is all we ever hear about from them in regard to education. I do not hear them come in here with big ideas or even being particularly critical of our ideas; they do not seem to notice education at all.

We on this side have the newly released excellence in every classroom guide, which is demonstrating our commitment to education across multiple spectrums. I am really proud to be part of a government that is so focused on education. It is a massive focus of this government, and talking about accessibility of education, I think that is really well demonstrated through our free TAFE and free kinder initiatives.

We spoke about mechanics institutes here a few months ago. It was a revolutionary concept that everyone should have the chance to access books and to learn. It came from Scotland. That sort of approach to education – education for the everyman and everywoman – is what this government has continued the tradition of.

Free kinder, we know, is helpful for children in their development. It means that we are helping to close the gap caused by disadvantage. Getting kids stimulated and into play-based learning from a young age is just fantastic for them to help to overcome difficulties they may have had earlier. It is great for mum and dad, who might want to get back to the workforce or quite frankly might have had enough of their kids – and I certainly commiserate with families on that – but it is also good for the economy. These big-thinking policies from this side are sorely lacking from those on the other side.

Speaking of quality – not just accessibility but quality – this bill really speaks to that. We want to make sure that education providers in Victoria are providing proper, quality education. The best education should not be reserved for those who have money to pay for it; the best education should be for all Victorians. So this bill seeks to make sure that there are no unregistered schools that will not have a focus on providing that high-quality education, unregistered schools that might have a focus on profit. For us education is not about profit, it is about the quality outcomes for students.

How could we ever not talk about phonics? This has been a huge game changer for schools in our state – an absolutely fantastic evidence-based approach to literacy and classroom teaching. I was lucky enough to have my daughter at a fantastic state school which already had a focus on phonics. I have seen how amazingly that has helped her learn to read and write, and I am so excited for all the families across Victoria who will get that same access to quality education. It means that literacy, books, the magic of learning and access to knowledge will be unlocked for children. To think about children who struggle to read and write, what an unnecessary barrier that places on them, locking them out of the wonder that comes from learning about the world around us, the wonder that comes from reading a book under the quilt with your torch at night-time. A love of reading is the foundation for everything in education, I am sure you would agree. A love of reading is all I ask for for my children. I think it makes a great difference, and our fantastic Minister for Education is making that possible for children across the state, and I could not be more proud.

I visited lots of schools in my electorate last week and spoke with principals David Jovanovski, Kathy Mourkakos, Anthony Oldmeadow, Kristin Hankins, David Williams and John Metcalfe – fantastic principals that we have in our area. We are so blessed to have such upright, dedicated, passionate education leaders in our area. I want them focused on the children and I want them focused on their schools and not having to spend their time on administrative tasks that could be better handled in another way or by someone else. So I am glad that this bill amends the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to allow school principals to nominate other persons or classes of persons to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements.

I think that is eminently sensible. We do not want to stop work experience. We had fantastic Liam doing work experience in my office from Mernda Central College. He was an absolutely fantastic example of the types of students they produce there and a fantastic representative of the school. He helped us immensely. He had a lot more knowledge of social media than I do, and I definitely benefited from that. I think I learned more from him that he did from me.

But some people, bless them, are called to teaching. My sisters are all teachers. We have got fabulous former teachers here in the chamber. Teachers from all walks of life and with all experiences are what we need. There should never be a barrier to someone becoming a teacher. I was speaking with a man in Wallara Waters estate in Wallan. His wife is a teachers aide at one of the local schools. She wanted to study teaching but was concerned about the student placement. I was so excited to explain to him about the paid placement for student-teachers available in regional areas and for special developmental schools, because having people who might be maturely coming to teaching or who have not had the chance to go straight into university from school to become teachers I think is really important because they bring life experience and a different view of the world to the classroom. We can only benefit from that. Victorian families can only benefit from the government on this side of the house because we cut the cakes, we do not cut the schools. I commend this bill to the house.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (18:42): It is my pleasure to rise today and speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. This important piece of legislation is yet another example of the priority that our government makes education in this state. I would like to thank the Minister for Education and his team for the tremendous work that they have done with this bill and right across their portfolio to ensure that Victoria remains the Education State.

This bill aims to strengthen the regulatory framework of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority and to improve the efficiency of administrative processes for the VRQA, other organisations in the education and skills and TAFE sectors, the entities under its regulation and school principals. The bill aims to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 by increasing penalties for unregistered schools, expanding the VRQA's authority to accept enforceable undertakings and allowing consideration of compliance with child safe standards for registered training organisations registrations. It also enables the VRQA to issue compliance notices, removes certain procedural requirements for voluntary school registration cancellations, clarifies information sharing powers, allows principals to delegate work experience arrangements and standardises board appointment and resignation processes. Lastly, the bill amends the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to allow school principals to nominate individuals or groups for work experience and structured learning arrangements. It also streamlines the appointment processes for education and skills and TAFE portfolio entities and reduces the administrative burdens for the authority, other entities and school principals.

We all have incredible schools in our community, but I think the local schools in the Lara electorate are some of the best. As a local member of Parliament, visiting schools, engaging with students and learning from them is one of my favourite things to do. Last week I had the pleasure of visiting two schools in my electorate. First, I visited Northern Bay's Peacock campus and spoke to year 7 and 8 students from Peacock and Hendy campuses. Unfortunately members in this place may have heard that we had a terrible fire at the Hendy campus at Northern Bay a couple of weeks ago, and the year 7 and 8s are still studying with their fellow students on the Peacock campus. So I want to say a big thankyou to all of the staff, students and families at Northern Bay, who have been incredible during this time in supporting students to continue with their education while the school is out of action for a little bit.

I spoke to the group of year 7s and 8s about careers and my career journey, and we had some fantastic questions. One of the questions that the students had for me was, 'Who is a member of Parliament, and what kind of career do members of Parliament have before entering this place?' I took them through some of the former professions in this place, from police officers to firefighters and lawyers, and I said, 'Actually, I think the number one former profession in this place is teachers.' We have so many teachers in this place, and I think it really says something about our incredible teachers in Victoria that we actually have quite a few of them ending up as members of Parliament.

Later in the week I had the opportunity to visit North Geelong Secondary College for their annual multicultural festival, an incredible annual event that brings together communities from Geelong's north. We had all of the local primary school students, staff and principals come along, and of course

the North Geelong Secondary students. Firstly, can I say well done to principal Paul Dawson and well done to the school captains, who organised this incredible event while they are also juggling their studies for year 12 exams. It is an amazing, amazing event and celebrates the culture and the diversity of the North Geelong Secondary College community.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

While I was there I also had the opportunity to visit the human stories project. This is a project that is led by CatholicCare Victoria and their school leader Nestor Estampa. It is an amazing project that supports young Victorians to tell their stories of migration to Australia, often from a refugee background. These are stories that really open our eyes to the experiences of other young people and everything that they have gone through to come to our state, to come to our country and start their lives here. There were some remarkable stories in the room. One student, Gloria, said that her story was a love letter to her mother. I also heard from Abby and Zena; they took me through their stories. Zena in particular, from an Afghan background, had lived in a number of other countries, and if my memory serves me correctly, English is actually his fourth language. It is really remarkable that as a teenager he is fluent in four languages – I think that is pretty incredible. As I said, we do have some incredible local schools in the Lara electorate, and I am really proud to get out there and visit them and do what I can as a local member of Parliament to amplify their incredible work and share their stories of their achievement.

On this side of the house we recognise the importance of legislative changes that work to uphold the high standards of education that we have here in Victoria. We have an education system to envy in Victoria. And this is not by chance; it is thanks to investments made by successive Labor governments that recognise the crucial role those significant investments in education have for the whole state. We have delivered key reforms and initiatives that have set a strong foundation. Not only have we delivered record investments into infrastructure development – which I will touch on further in a moment – we have prioritised initiatives to drive real reforms such as teacher training and support, curriculum enhancement and early childhood education. I have said this many times in the house before, and I will say it many, many, many more times: my mum was a teacher, and when I was growing up she taught me the value of having great teachers to support children throughout their educational journeys. School is so much more than just what you learn in the classroom. It is about all the support that goes around that entire experience. My mum is an incredible role model to me, and she was an incredible teacher.

On this side of the house we can really hold our heads high. Our record speaks for itself when it comes to building the Education State. We have invested $14.9 billion into funding 122 new schools, 2200 school upgrades and 66 school expansions, and I am so proud that many of these are in the Lara electorate. I know that the benefits of this investment are certainly appreciated by the residents of the Lara electorate, particularly in our school communities. In fact I was recently joined by the Minister for Education as we officially opened the brand new learning spaces at the Libau Avenue campus of Nelson Park School. The school received $6.4 million to build new learning spaces for students and staff, office spaces, an incredible art room, a sensory room and STEM room, and a standalone year 9 learning space. Students from the school spoke about how much this investment in the new spaces meant to them. I have mentioned to this house before the words of Tyson, a grade 5 and 6 student, who said that:

> We have gone from 1 to 100. Our new buildings are comfortable and we can learn. We have new furniture and our teachers have places to meet. We have a great deck and a beautiful view. We are able to put our art work up and it is like a gallery.

But that is not the only amazing local school we have officially reopened in the electorate. Just recently the Premier joined me at another school, Northern Bay Goldsworthy campus. We toured the $17 million upgrade at this school, which has seen a brand new performing arts centre, administration buildings and classrooms built. I have also mentioned in this house previously that Western Heights Secondary College was allocated $7.5 million in the 2023–24 state budget for construction of a

competition-grade gym to complete the works there at their incredible school. This funding will complement the amazing programs that school is running, supporting talented football, basketball, netball and soccer athletes with the necessary skills to achieve their goals, both academically and athletically.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

There is one area of this bill that I would like to delve a little deeper into with the time I have left, and that is the power for principals to delegate work experience arrangements. I got my start in politics when I did work experience with my local MP, the former member for Mordialloc Janice Munt, an incredible local member. In fact I probably would not be here today without that week of work experience. It opened my eyes to the world of politics and government. Since becoming a member of Parliament I have offered work experience to a number of local students, and they have all been incredible weeks of learning for both the students and for me. As a member for Yan Yean said earlier, and I echo her comments, 'I have probably learned more from the students than they have from me.' Just recently I had two work experience students, Paris Genomena from North Geelong Secondary College and Roqya Hosseini from Northern Bay College. They are incredible young leaders in their school communities who are currently undergoing year 12 exams, and I wish them the very best of luck with their exams and whatever is next. I know, Paris and Roqya, that you both have bright futures ahead of you, and I cannot wait to see what you do.

This government is all about education. We are building the Education State right here in this place, and this bill is another piece of that puzzle. I commend the bill to the house.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (18:52): It is always great to follow on from the member for Lara. I would like to begin by passing on my thoughts to the Auburn South Primary School community. It is obviously really terrible what happened yesterday. I take it from the member for Hawthorn that it is a good, strong school community who will look after each other, but I know everyone in this chamber has been thinking about that school community and the effects that this will have.

As a former teacher, I love speaking on education bills, and this one, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, really does hit some of the targets that I think we have been talking about for some time and that we really need some reform on. The first reform that I would like to speak about is that this really strengthens the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Regulations and Qualifications Authority. We have heard these stories about rogue operators and rogue schools. When I found out about this the first time and read the first story about this I actually could not believe what I was reading, so it is great that they will have more powers and strengthened powers to actually deal with this issue and stamp out this threat to a good education in a lot of ways. We are making it harder for unregistered, noncompliant schools to fall through the cracks and getting students to the safe, quality education they deserve.

The bill also allows principals to nominate others to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements as well, easing the admin burden on them and their staff and allowing them to focus their energy on running schools. I certainly remember – it would have been in the same year as the Member for Monbulk, 2021 or 2020 – when I did my teaching rounds. Mirboo North Secondary College was one of them, and it was pretty hard at the time. Now we are introducing paid placements for teachers doing their teaching rounds. I think it is a game changer. I think most people in this chamber know that I probably was not brought up in the most luxurious and wealthy family. Certainly when I did my teaching rounds I took a little trip to the op shop to get a suit – I reckon I looked pretty snappy; I ironed it even – and then I went out to do my teaching rounds. Those teaching rounds meant that I could not bring in a wage for two to three weeks. That was the first round, and then there was the next round and those following years. I know the member for Narre Warren South would have would have done those teaching rounds as well.

That I guess led me to becoming the MP for Frankston and really maintaining that growth that we have had over 10 years in our schools but also being a little bit cheeky, I guess, and having a play on words with the 'education electorate' and making sure that people know that Frankston is in the Education State.

We had a principals morning tea only last week where I was able to thank those principals for all the hard work they do in Frankston. In some areas of Frankston it is the principals that provide the foundation for children and youth to eat and to have that positive social contact and role modelling, and there is really some pastoral care in there as well and some mental health care. They do such a great job. It reminded me though that you can kind of forget sometimes, in the context of getting so much done, what some of your schools have achieved. The Frankston North Education Plan with Mahogany Rise Primary School, Aldercourt Primary School and Monterey Secondary College has actually transformed an area which was the fourth in the dropping-off-the-edge list nationally – so the fourth most disadvantaged postcode nationally, with a fairly, I would say, non-apparent school community – into a school community where these principals are winning national awards and the schools are winning state awards and national awards as well. So they have come along way.

I notice that the member for Mornington lately has been – well, I think I have been living rent-free in his head, which is okay with me. He tends to talk a little bit about a school called Mount Erin College, and they are a great school. At one stage they needed a hockey ground – just from memory I think we built them their hockey ground – but there is a new project in the works for that school as well. Even though it is not in his electorate, he does take an interest in it, and I love that – that is great. But I think he is doubting that we would do this, so I would like to put his mind to rest and reaffirm why Frankston is the education electorate. So I am just going to – off the top of my head – think of what we have done in the last 10 years, just to ease the member for Mornington's mind that we will actually get the job done, because that is what we do.

Frankston Primary School – from memory I think we built a new junior wing at Frankston Primary School. At the David Scott School they have a new refurbishment and redevelopment underway at the moment. Frankston High School – the member for Dunkley and I just opened up their brand new wing. It is two or three storeys from memory – not quite like the Frankston Hospital, which you can see from the moon, but is still pretty big and I know they appreciate it. Frankston Heights got a new wing recently. Overport Primary School has been funded for its new oval. I remember taking the Treasurer out to Overport Primary School, and he looked at some of the holes in the oval and he said, 'No, no, we can do better than this.' We have finally got the funding for that.

Of course there are Monterey Secondary College, Mahogany Rise Primary School and Aldercourt Primary School. Those schools have literally been rebuilt. In almost all of those schools, every wing has been rebuilt. And that is not just infrastructure – the way they do education and work with that community has been rebuilt. McClelland College has got a new hall. Kingsley Park got a new wing. Ballam Park has got a new wing, which has really changed and transformed the look of that school, and I note that today Ballam Park Primary School changed their Facebook picture to be the new wing of their school, which just lets us know they are so proud of that. Frankston Special Developmental School has two new wings.

Naranga School at the moment is building a new wing as well, and I spoke about that in a members statement this morning. I did a little visit, and you could see all these kids looking through the hoarding, through little portals of perspex, seeing all the diggers and everyone working on it. They line up and they are crawling on top of people to see these people at work; it is quite wonderful. We have also got Karingal Heights. Derinya – a three-storey wing right there in Frankston South, which is much needed, as they are a bit landlocked. They asked for it – we delivered. Kananook Primary School – we just opened a new garden there. The Nepean School – they have had lots of refurbishment in that school, including new lifts. When I used to work there as a CRT, casual relief teacher, in probably 2000, we were still changing kids in Tyvek suits on the floor with no lift for kids with special abilities.

We have also got the kinders as well. Almost every kinder has had an upgrade of course with the state government's mandate, and there is one I go past all the time. Baden Powell has had a full rebuild. It looks amazing, and I know the member for Mornington must be going past it quite often and he can see what we have done as the Education State, in the education electorate. So I really, really want to ensure that we commend this bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Princes Highway west

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:00): (891) My adjournment debate this evening is in fact for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek this evening is for an emergency urgent resurfacing of the Princes Highway west of Geelong between Geelong, Winchelsea and Colac. This duplicated road is only relatively new. The left-hand lanes both in the west direction and the east direction are both seriously compromised. Our local papers recently covered the cost to the local community – in one day one pothole claimed four vehicles. Whether it is the tyre repair people or the rim sellers – we have even had large B-double truck transports lose tyres. The condition of the road is substandard. Unfortunately, Minister, we read with great disbelief that in your alleged road blitz coming up this summer road season there are no funds allocated for the Princes Highway west. The funds to have this resurfaced will probably have to come from a Treasurer's advance or some other source of immediate funding, but it is a very dangerous road.

The Princes Highway west was built as a 100-kilometre-an-hour road. It has wire rope barriers in the middle median and on the sides along the full length of the road from Geelong to Colac. This road is supposed to be a premier well-surfaced, safe road. Unfortunately today we have got large sections of the road down to 80 kilometres an hour, with no clear plan from this government on when it is going to be fixed. There is absolute unanimity in the Polwarth electorate and from the people that use this road, whether they are transport users, whether they are driving the school buses each day or whether they are people making their way to Geelong for health appointments or other work or people that drive to Colac every day for work or appointments, that this road needs to be safe.

I encountered it the other day, driving home late at night when it was raining, and you cannot see the potholes. It is very dangerous; The road just becomes a shiny surface. Most worrying is the left-hand lane. We are not talking about potholes or poor edges off to the left of the white line. These are massive holes and at times craters on the drive sides of the road. It needs immediate repair. It is simply not good enough. It is past patching. It is a complete resurfacing of the road from Colac to Winchelsea that is desperately needed. I call on you, Minister, to find the resources, because this important road, which will be carrying many, many tourists over the coming months, must be safe and fit and suitable for 100 kilometres an hour.

Nadrasca

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:03): (892) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Disability in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Nadrasca farm in Vermont in my electorate. Nadrasca is a disability support organisation in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, helping people live their lives their way. Nadrasca supports over 300 people to achieve their personal and professional goals through a diverse range of supports and services.

Last week I attended Nadrasca's AGM, where we got to see the great work that the organisation has achieved over the past year, and I would like to acknowledge the great people who received their life memberships. Sue Lees is one of Nadrasca's first supported employees. Having joined Nadrasca in 1975, Sue is fast approaching 50 years of service, which is truly remarkable. Dianne Mitchell has been

involved with Nadrasca since the mid-1970s. She volunteered through extra activities at night, fundraising and organising social events. She was also instrumental in establishing the 18-plus program, now known as My Life, My Future. Frances Farmer has been involved with Nadrasca since its inception in the 1960s and has made significant contributions both financially and through extensive volunteering over the years. Sonja Spicer has been a tireless advocate for people with disabilities and has always stepped in whenever Nadrasca needed her. Her involvement has led to the creation of many new services. And Maryanne Weir is Nadrasca's longest standing current employee. She helped set up the 18-plus program and is universally loved by participants, families and staff. My heartfelt congratulations go to Sue, Dianne, Frances, Sonja and Maryanne. I would also like to thank CEO Glenn Hodgkin, chair Douglas Mitchell and their dedicated and committed staff, whose efforts continually make a remarkable difference to the lives of many people living with disabilities in Melbourne's east.

One of the recent examples of Nadrasca's success is building customised pathways that focus on skill development for participants interested in gaining employment in their newly established Rookie Cafe. What started as a small group of participants learning to make and sell coffees, Rookie Cafe has grown into an establishment serving staff and guests, with a full morning tea and lunch menu on offer. I hope the Minister for Disability can come and visit this great organisation and perhaps even have a cuppa at Rookie Cafe and see the amazing work that they do.

Country Fire Authority Charlton brigade

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:05): (893) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is to urgently fund a new Charlton CFA station. The original station in Charlton was built in 1931. As you can imagine, there is not a lot of room for female members of the Charlton fire brigade to get changed. What is even more crucial is that in 2021 the brigade was lucky enough to receive a new tanker, and this addition the brigade is very happy with, of course. In Captain Walsh's words, it has all the bells and whistles they need. However, it does not fit in the station; it has to be parked offsite. That, as you can imagine, creates all sorts of problems. One, it decreases turnout times. The CFA in Charlton do a remarkable job when responding to storms and when responding to, obviously, fires, but because the tanker is parked offsite in the captain's yard, that is an issue. It is a huge issue. This has gone around in circles a few times. Some land was purchased. The land is actually now sitting there. The original land purchased was not suitable because it was in a flood plain. Cast your mind back a couple of years and there were a lot of floods that happened, so more land has been purchased now.

I was actually talking to the district commander about this at the Red Cliffs fire brigade centenary dinner on Saturday night, and he said that it is their highest priority across the entire district, the Charlton CFA fire station. That demonstrates, when you have the captain writing to me – and I have gone to visit so I could see the lack of facilities. To be fair, the changing area in this station is a partition, and that is it. The toilet is outside. It was built in 1931. It is a lovely old building. It would make a great space for the historical society, but it is not fit for purpose for a CFA brigade in Charlton that does such a wonderful, wonderful job. As I have said already in this place this week, the CFA in rural and regional Victoria are the backbone, the heart and soul and stomach of regional and rural communities like Charlton. They do such an incredible job. So the action I seek this evening is to urgently fund – urgently; it is absolutely critical, because again, if a new station is not funded, then it will start to cost lives because the turnout times will be dramatically decreased if we have to wait for the captain, who does have a life outside of the CFA, to open his yard to get the tanker out.

The Orange Door

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (19:08): (894) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit the Belgrave Orange Door. The establishment of the Orange Door in Belgrave has been an invaluable resource for vulnerable residents across the Dandenong Ranges and the foothills. It offers a critical access point for

individuals and families experiencing family violence, providing comprehensive support services under one roof. The community has greatly benefited from this service, with many families being able to find the help they need closer to home. The expansion of Orange Door services highlights our government's ongoing commitment to addressing family violence and ensuring access to vital services in regional and outer metropolitan areas like Belgrave. I look forward to the minister joining me in Belgrave to meet with staff, service providers and community members and to hear firsthand about the positive changes which the Orange Door has brought to our region.

Anti-vilification legislation

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (19:09): (895) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General. The action I seek is for the Attorney-General to provide an update on the Labor government's consultation of faith communities as they prepare to pass changes to Victoria's anti-vilification laws. The Allan Labor government's proposed changes to the anti-vilification law risk the freedom of religion for people of faith and the freedom of speech of Victorians more generally.

These proposals are a concerning threat to freedoms we take for granted. Current anti-vilification legislation is effectively restricted to race and religion in alignment with the rest of the country, albeit there have been issues of freedoms even with the current laws, yet this Labor government wishes to broaden these laws to cover a variety of other traits such as disability, gender identity, sexual characteristics and sexual orientation. That all sounds well and good until one looks at the details. The government is trying to lower the legal bar for what qualifies as vilification. Currently one must actively incite hatred to commit a criminal offence. Under the proposed changes speech that is likely to incite will become a criminal offence. Under this standard almost all speech referring to those with protected attributes, regardless of intent or context, could be deemed criminal. Journalists, writers, comedians, academics, artists, business leaders, entertainers, absolutely anyone could be caught by this, not to mention people of faith where a public or online expression of one's faith, whether you are Jewish, Christian, Muslim or any other faith, could be considered vilification if somebody subjectively feels that their protected attributes have been harmed.

People of faith may be silenced from expressing their views and could potentially face legal action for sharing their faith-based or general views on sexuality and biology. Going from objective to subjective harm is dangerous. It may effectively determine that certain groups based on certain attributes have a special moral status in our society, a special moral status that if you question will leave you possibly going to jail under these new laws. Let me reiterate a point I made in my inaugural speech: it is not wrong to be a Christian or a person of faith or someone who speaks their mind. In a secular, multi-ethnic and multifaith society like Victoria the government should be actively fostering healthy debate instead of enacting laws that might force compliance and make the expression of one's faith or views more difficult. With an open society and open debate, we promote a marketplace of ideas. As former Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies said:

> Stagnant waters are level, and in them the scum rises. Active waters are never level: they toss and tumble and have crests and troughs; but the scientists tell us that they purify themselves in a few hundred yards.

We must ensure active waters, we must protect debate and objectivity, and we must oppose this government's assault on freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Lara electorate school principals

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:12): (896) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action that I seek from the minister is to visit with the exceptional principals from the Lara electorate. The Lara electorate is home to the best schools, the best teachers and the best students, and it is also home to amazing principals that work every day to ensure that young people in their schools are supported and their best interests are always front and centre. I would appreciate the minister coming out to meet these principals, to celebrate them and thank them for their contribution to our Education State. It would also be a great opportunity for the minister to hear from these principals

about the unique challenges that they are facing within their school communities, and I look forward to hosting him.

Mental health workers

Tim READ (Brunswick) (19:13): (897) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Industrial Relations. As part of the negotiations of the Victorian Public Mental Health Services Enterprise Agreement 2020–2024 a memorandum of understanding was executed between the department, the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association and unions to deliver a further 800 mental health worker positions across all area mental health services. This promise was welcomed by unions as a positive sign of the government's commitment to improving Victoria's mental health system. In particular providing these 800 positions would go a long way to ensuring that our bed-based mental health services would no longer be understaffed and overloaded. Unfortunately right now there are not enough mental health workers employed in bed-based services, which means the existing workers are overstretched, unsafe and unsupported.

In turn, without adequate staffing, people seeking urgent mental health support are often unable to get personalised care when they need it. I understand that earlier this month the government said they would no longer be fulfilling this promise and would instead be directing a smaller number of new mental health staff, mostly to the new mental health and wellbeing locals. While it is important to support the locals and indeed to roll out the rest of the locals without further delay, as we saw in the last state budget, this does not help mental health workers in our existing bed-based services. If we cannot get our bed-based services right, it is impossible for the mental health system as a whole to function properly. I am told that currently acutely unwell people are going to the locals which on occasion are not able to meet their needs, and so those people get referred to the emergency department, but they cannot get admitted there because of insufficient staff in mental health wards, and they end up going back to the locals, and the cycle continues.

With adequately staffed and resourced bed-based services, people seeking mental health services could get treatment when they need it and the currently overworked staff would be sharing their excess clinical load with 800 other qualified workers across the state. Minister, the action I seek is for the government to keep their promise to the mental health workforce and unions and to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to improving Victoria's mental health system by urgently implementing these missing 800 positions as agreed in the last EBA.

McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:15): (898) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to come down to my electorate to meet with Lisa Byrne, the CEO of the fabulous McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery in Langwarrin. The gallery opened in 1971 and features the first bespoke modernist gallery designed by architects Munro and Sargent. It is an absolutely wonderful space to visit and to walk around to look at all of the amazing sculptures – over 100, but not all are on display at once. You can also go inside and see some of the wonderful art exhibitions or have a coffee or lunch at Harry's Cafe. It is a truly unique gallery based in the heart of Langwarrin. They have some terrific plans for building a sustainable future for art and culture in my electorate, which I would like to share with the minister. I look forward to the minister's visit.

Narracan electorate roads

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:16): (899) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to fix the intersection of Hope Street, Bunyip, and the Princes Highway straightaway. I get increasingly frustrated in this chamber when we bring up adjournment issues and nothing happens, but I get even more frustrated for my constituents when they write letters to ministers and nothing is forthcoming from there. This is an

email I received from David White from Bunyip; he wrote to the minister. I will quote this letter for *Hansard*:

> Good afternoon Ms Horne,
>
> Firstly I would like to say thank you for your response to my email in August 2023, your reference CMIN-1-23-4172.
>
> My reason for writing to you again as in that in the correspondence you advised that the DTP inspected the site on 10th August 2023 and expect to have works completed early 2024. I would just like to let you know that here we are 14 months after my email to you and almost at the end of 2024 and the only thing that has happened at this intersection is a few dabs of yellow paint and nothing more.
>
> I would like to refer you to 3 photos that I have attached which I took last night, the photos do not do justice as to how deep these holes actually are. One you will see is showing that the traffic island is now starting to fall with large chunks of concrete having to get moved by the public. The pot holes while they get filled every few weeks are as bad, if not worse than they have ever been. You now cannot get out of Hope Street in Bunyip onto the Princes Freeway without at least one side of the vehicle having to enter one of these many pot holes. Honestly I find this an absolute disgrace that we pay registration and fuel levies as well as having to pay for to the damage to our tyres and have conditions like this not only locally here but right across the state of Victoria. I always wonder if I was to put my OH&S hat on would I accept something like this if I was in the car park at work, I'm sure you would know what my answer to that would be.
>
> I would ask if you could please contact the DTP again to have some urgent action taken on this intersection.

It is bad enough being an opposition member and not having adjournment matters addressed by ministers of this government, but when they start ignoring local constituents for 18 months about an intersection that is clearly dangerous and falling apart, I think it is absolutely disgraceful. I would like the minister to address this intersection as soon as possible.

Bellarine electorate allied health professionals

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:19): (900) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how the recent announcement of a second round of the speech pathology and occupational therapy students grant program will benefit the electorate of the Bellarine. I have had concerned residents meet with me to discuss the limited number of allied health professionals available on the Bellarine and surrounding areas, especially regarding speech pathology. I am very pleased to see a second round of this grant program has opened up to encourage students in their final year of study to start a career in rural or regional areas across Victoria, like the Bellarine. I look forward to hearing an update from the minister to share with my electorate.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:20): A number of very important issues were raised tonight in the adjournment debate by a range of hardworking members of Parliament. I will ensure that those important issues are passed on to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:20 pm.