



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 30 May 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

**Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament**

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁵	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁶	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁶ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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Thursday 30 May 2024

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

Joint sitting of Parliament

Senate vacancy

The SPEAKER (09:33): I advise that the house met yesterday with the Legislative Council to fill the Senate vacancy following the death of Senator Linda White and that Lisa Darmanin was duly chosen.

Petitions

Gippsland police resources

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) presented a petition bearing 2324 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly their concerns regarding the rise in crime and lack of police presence and resources across the Gippsland area.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to provide more funding and resources to boost police presence and deter crime in Gippsland.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 38

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Service Victoria Act 2018* – Service Victoria Identity Verification Standards.

Committees

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Reference

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:34): I move, by leave:

That this house requires the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee to inquire into, consider and report by Friday 30 August 2024 on the impact of land tax on Victorian individuals and businesses and in particular that the committee examines matters including but not limited to:

the financial impacts of land tax on housing affordability and availability for renters and rental providers;

the impact of increased land valuations on the community, small businesses and the economy at large since 1 July 2018, when valuation authority transitioned from local councils to the Valuer-General Victoria;

the volatility of tax lines such as stamp duty and the impact of these factors on government's decisions to introduce changes to land tax at the 2023–24 budget;

the process and criteria utilised by the Valuer-General Victoria to calculate land tax valuations;

arrangements for transparency and accountability for the State Revenue Office objection process;

the process and criteria used by the State Revenue Office when making determinations of land tax exemptions;

modelling, projections, costings and other forecasts concerning the future impacts of land tax on Victorian individuals and businesses;

analysis of historical land tax rates and potential need for bracket reform, taking into account increases to average and median Victorian house prices over time; and

any other related matter.

Leave refused.

Motions

Member conduct

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house reaffirms the requirement that all members of the speakers panel remain impartial when they are in the chair.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:36): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 18 June 2024.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Early childhood education

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (09:37): An investment in kinder is an investment in our future. It is well established that investments in children's learning and development at the earliest years in life are among the highest returns that can be made in education. Consistent and attentive care in the early years will ensure safe and stimulating child care. That is why the Allan Labor government's Best Start, Best Life is nation-leading reform providing free three- and four-year-old kindergarten – it is all about being the Education State – and lifelong learning beginning in early childhood extending all the way through to a person's career.

I had the great pleasure of joining the mayor of Moonee Valley last month to announce that five kindergartens around the Niddrie electorate will be upgraded, providing over 500 new kindergarten places. You have got Airport West on McNamara Avenue, where yours truly went to kindergarten; Milleara Gardens in Keilor East; Montgomery Park in Essendon – the member for Essendon is here; Lincolnville kinder in Keilor East; and Coronation kinder in Ascot Vale in the member for Essendon's electorate, because we know to make sure children thrive later in life you have got to provide that early investment in the first 2000 days. Three- and four-year-old kinder, groundbreaking pre-prep reform, sets our young people up for life to ensure they can go through prep well prepared, primary school and secondary school and in the Education State choose their pathway through record investment in the university sector or TAFE and go on and live a life of purpose.

Marc and Eva Besen

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:38): Last Thursday I attended a memorial service to celebrate the lives of Marc Besen AC and Eva Besen AO. Marc was a Holocaust survivor that came to Australia as a boy. Marc and Eva were married for 71 years. They built a successful retail empire – the Sussan group. Their passion was philanthropy, using their success for good. The Besen Family

Foundation founded TarraWarra Museum, Australia's first museum supported by a large private endowment; countless donations; and countless supports for schools, Jewish life, health and social welfare right across our community. The apple has not fallen far from the tree with Naomi Milgrom AC, Carol Schwartz AO, Debbie Dadon AM and Daniel Besen. All of their children do so much for philanthropy and the broader state of Victoria.

Yeshivah College

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:39): I also want to give a shout-out to Yeshivah College. Last week I hosted Yeshivah College grade 6 boys in Parliament. They are all vying for your seat, Speaker. They loved Parliament House. Rick Milsom, a teacher, along with Frank Greenstein, was there with the boys. We heard a great speech from the school captain Eitan Garfield. A big shout-out to the questions from Yitzhak Slaven and Mendy Wonder, some great future leaders, and a shout-out to all the Yeshivah boys.

Wyndham Park tool library

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (09:40): I rise to update the house on the new Wyndham Park tool library, recently opened in my electorate. The library was made possible with \$91,900 delivered through Sustainability Victoria with additional support from Wyndham City Council and Wyndham Park Community Centre. The library allows local residents to borrow up to 400 items for a low annual fee. As some people in this place may have twigged, I know a tool when I see one. The Wyndham Park tool library includes a wide array of garden tools, woodworking and carpentry tools, artists' tools, construction tools, camping equipment and more. This initiative not only promotes sustainability by encouraging the sharing and reuse of tools but also fosters a sense of community amongst residents.

I would like to thank Wyndham mayor Jennie Barrera, who joined me to cut the ribbon, as well as Lyn Mackay, a volunteer who assists with the running of the library. This library would not be possible without the incredible work of volunteers such as Lyn. Thank you also to Dan Schultheis and Ian Fenton, the community shed and tool library manager and centre manager respectively, for their good work. Libraries like this are the glue or perhaps more appropriately the heavy-duty liquid nails that hold communities together. I look forward to seeing the library grow and to borrowing a tool now and again and encourage others to do so.

Doreen Wessel

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:41): Today I want to give a big shout-out to Doreen Wessel of Edge FM in Wangaratta, who is hanging up the virtual microphone tomorrow. Doreen has been an absolute ray of sunshine for 3NE Edge FM and more importantly a pillar of our community locally, always smiling and always happy to make things happen. I am sure you will have the caravan hooked up, and we cannot wait to hear about your journey in retirement. Congratulations on a job well done, and may a glass of wine be at the end of every day.

Ruth Kneebone

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:42): Ruth Kneebone was awarded the Citizen of the Year earlier this year, and she said it was the thought of having her handprint on Marmungun Rock that would make it feel real. This occurred last Sunday, which was another fine example of the coming together of a community. The late Uncle Wally Cooper started this journey, and the Wangaratta community are stronger for this important celebration. Congratulations, Ruth. You are now carved in stone.

Salvation Army, Wangaratta

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:42): This Saturday we were excited for the opening of the Wangaratta Salvation Army on Greta Road in Wangaratta. Peter and Rhonda Lewis will be steering the ship, and we are grateful for their leadership. The Salvos are an important part of our history and

are still more important every day of every year. The Salvos have played such an important role in our communities. Sometimes things do not always go the way we plan, but the Salvos are always there. Thank God for the Salvos.

Romsey skate park

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:43): Back in 2022 the Lancefield Romsey Lions Club came to me with a dream to revitalise the Romsey skate park and the Lions Park reserve. I was proud to back this vision with a \$500,000 election commitment announced onsite at a community barbecue hosted by the Lions. This funding was delivered in last year's budget, but with cost escalations in the construction industry it was clear more funding was going to be needed. I was thrilled when this year's budget delivered a further \$400,000, meaning that this dream will become a reality. The kids of Romsey deserve nothing less than great recreational facilities, and the Allan Labor government is proud to back them in. Of course none of this would have been possible without the tireless advocacy of the Lancefield Romsey Lions Club. I particularly want to acknowledge Ged and Wendy McLaughlin, who are unwavering in their commitment to community service. Thank you, Ged and Wendy. It is a privilege to know you.

Tony Davis

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:43): Congratulations also to Tony Davis, who back in 1970 was a founding member of Kyneton Little Aths. Since then he has volunteered every Saturday morning, racking up an amazing 53 years of supporting young athletes. This outstanding dedication saw Tony awarded the Macedon Ranges Citizen of the Year back in January, and in March Tony received a Victorian volunteer commitment award at Government House. Thank you, Tony. It is people like you that make Macedon such a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:44): Today I would like to thank the representatives of the Surf Coast shire, Colac Otway shire and Corangamite shire who have been down here this week in Parliament meeting with members of Parliament and of course the government and opposition about the issues that really matter to the people in Polwarth. It is interesting to note, having just had the budget handed down, the issues around the Surf Coast. The number one priority is affordable housing: where can people live? How can people afford to live? Increasing taxes, increasing regulation, limits to land supply and excess bureaucracy brought about by this state are really affecting people badly on the Surf Coast. In Corangamite of course the number one issue is the lack of funding for roads, and locals in the Simpson area in particular and the Cobden area are really well aware of the lack of ongoing maintenance on road surfaces, particularly the Lavers Hill-Cobden Road and the Cobden-Warrnambool Road. Both have had excessive amounts of accidents and mishaps on those roads due to very, very poor surfaces. And of course the Colac Otway shire is desperate for support around strengthening its industrial base, attracting business and supporting development and land release, which are really important issues to supplying both workforce accommodation and also to continuing to attract businesses to the region. It was fantastic to host these people, the mayors of those shires in our region, down here in Parliament this week.

Ava Steel

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:46): A big shout-out to Ava Steel, who on the weekend was talent ID'd at a local netball tournament. Ava is an absolute gun netballer. Ava, your mum, your dad, family and friends are all so terribly proud of you. You are an absolute gun.

Community Grocer

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:46): I was delighted to be down at the Community Grocer at Debney Meadows Primary School on the weekend, and I got to meet Georgia and the team. It is wonderful to see the community of Flemington come together at Debney Meadows Primary School to celebrate and enjoy those connections – the ability to have Ethiopian coffee with beautiful fresh produce as well.

Flemington Works

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:46): I was pleased also to attend the Flemington Works partnership celebration on the Saturday. Flemington Works is one of the most successful employment programs in the state's history – around about \$3000 per employment outcome for residents on the public housing estate. It was a celebration with a number of community providers who are providing the dignity of work to so many public housing tenants in Flemington. I do want to give a shout-out to Moonee Valley City Council and Helen Sui, the CEO, as well as Pierce Tyson, the mayor – an outstanding local government authority doing great work in our community.

Italian Seniors of Ascot Vale

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:47): I am very much looking forward to this Sunday, when the Italian Seniors of Ascot Vale will celebrate 30 years. It will be great to see Rosa, Nick and all the community members to celebrate this great occasion. I cannot wait. Thank you so much for everything you have done for the Ascot Vale community.

Black Rock Primary School

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:47): I had the great privilege of meeting with Black Rock Primary year 6 students recently ahead of their trip to Canberra. We discussed Parliament, government and innovative ideas for improving our community, and I am certain that the future is bright with leaders like this in my community.

Eunice Duck

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:47): I also recently met with Eunice Duck to celebrate her 100th birthday. I can tell you Eunice does not skip a beat, and the banter we had was incredibly fun. I hope that she was smiling for the rest of her day. I certainly was.

Highett West Cricket Club

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:48): I recently congratulated the Highett West Cricket Club on their first premiership in 40 years. You can imagine that the Highett West Cricket Club celebrated this with great purpose. As a proud supporter and sponsor of the club I am just thrilled with this historic achievement for the club, and I congratulate them for it.

Bayside citizenship ceremony

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:48): Recently Bayside council welcomed 300 new citizens into our community, and it makes me proud that our community is such a diverse community, one that is welcoming and one that extends the arm of friendship and the arm of welcome to so many new migrants living within our community.

Sally Kane

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:48): It was National Volunteer Week last week, and I had the great privilege of presenting Sally Kane, a president of the Highett Youth Club, with a Victoria award to celebrate her 17 years of contribution to the Highett Youth Club.

Olympic Park, Heidelberg West

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:49): The football and cricket are back bigger than ever at Heidelberg’s Olympic Park thanks to the completion of the new fields at the popular community sports venue, an \$18.5 million redevelopment. I was pleased to join National Premier League stalwarts Heidelberg United to officially open the new fields on the south and north ovals. The latest addition to the park’s recent rejuvenation is backed by an \$8 million Allan government investment. The delivery is in four stages. The park’s ongoing works provide a home for all things sport and recreation in West Heidelberg, and I want to thank the Minister for Community Sport and the former Minister for Sport the Honourable John Eren for their contributions and leadership in this project – very significant.

These latest additions to the precinct include two new football pitches on the south oval to complement the cricket oval. The north oval also features a football pitch within the oval which can be used for other cricket games. The new fields will provide a great new training and competition venue for the over 450 players of the Heidelberg United Football Club and more than 120 cricketers at the mighty Olympic Colts Cricket Club. The new fields complement the recently completed synthetic MiniRoos pitch with lighting and upgrades to Heidelberg United’s main competition pitch. The project has also delivered cricket practice nets, an acrylic basketball and futsal area and the refurbishment of the Aboriginal gathering place Barrbunin Beek. A new sports pavilion is also on the way and expected to be completed in late 2026.

I would like to thank Banyule City Council for their \$10.5 million investment on top of that \$8 million from the Allan Labor government. With Tom Melican it was great to open those facilities. President Steve Tsalikidis, you are a legend.

Amelia van Vliet

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:50): Next month I will have the privilege of travelling to Papua New Guinea along other MPs, including the member for Gippsland East, and a band of scholarship winners to tackle the Kokoda Track. This represents an invaluable opportunity to gain firsthand insight into the Gippsland connection to the Kokoda Track and the enormous sacrifices made by soldiers from my community. As fate would have it, the inaugural winner of the Marsh/Tierney scholarship for the Morwell electorate has a deeply personal and touching connection to the Kokoda Track.

When Kurnai College student Amelia van Vliet was just one year old her father Euan Comrie wanted to honour his grandfather – who served in Commando Double Black – and walk the Kokoda Track. Tragically, on the flight to Kokoda the aeroplane carrying Amelia’s dad and nine other Australians crashed into a mountain and there were no survivors. Now, 15 years on, Amelia will honour her dad’s memory and finish what he started by taking on the Kokoda Track. Amelia’s story and her motivation for wanting to take on the challenge is truly amazing, and I can think of no more worthy winner of the inaugural Marsh/Tierney scholarship. I am sure Amelia and her amazing story will serve as an extra source of motivation for all of us taking on this challenge.

State Emergency Service Frankston unit

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (09:52): Last weekend I joined with proud members of the Frankston SES unit as well as volunteers and personnel from other emergency services organisations, including Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, SES Chelsea unit, Skye fire brigade, Carrum Downs fire brigade and Fire Rescue Victoria, to officially open the Frankston SES satellite facility in Skye.

It was a big day and an emotional one too – so many years in the making and so much fierce advocacy by so many, but especially the members and volunteers of Frankston SES, who I have got to know so well over this nearly nine-year journey and who I am proud to call my friends. Special mention goes to Brooke Bird, Priscilla Grimme, Shane Double, Monique Napolitan, Mark Ivory, Philip Holt, Alisha

Wells, Dimity Lynch, Brad O'Donoghue, Paul O'Donoghue and Wayne Roberts and of course, especially, Brian McMannis.

To every single member of the Frankston SES unit, I am in awe of you – local community members whose sole motivation is to help others. You train for it, and you deliver. We owe you not just our gratitude and thanks but the facilities to reflect your commitment and dedication to the local community. Well, the new fit-for-purpose facility in Skye will hopefully do just that and help the Frankston SES expand their vital services to cover the growing communities of Skye, Carrum Downs and Sandhurst. The Skye now is truly orange.

I put out the call to residents in my community to consider putting up their hand to volunteer with Frankston SES or indeed any one of our volunteer emergency organisations.

Elsternwick Primary School

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:53): There are four very special leaders in my community: Max, Alby, Charlie and Oscar. These four young people from Elsternwick Primary School have made a real difference and shown how one selfless act can make change. The four students recently shaved their heads to raise money for Lung Foundation Australia following the diagnosis of a loved one. Through their collective efforts these four young community leaders managed to raise \$23,000. Thank you, Max, Alby, Charlie and Oscar. We are so proud of you.

Hampton Primary School

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:54): Grade 6 students from Hampton Primary have shared with me a number of proactive initiatives for the Parliament to consider. Concerned that less than 20 per cent of people are properly hydrated, Mark and Tasman propose increasing water station infrastructure, which they feel would reduce the use of plastic bottles also. And with concerns about mental health, Isaac and Jamie have proposed that more schools have pets in classrooms as animals improve mental health. Thank you for the wonderful ideas, students.

Government performance

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:54): Before the last election the Labor Party promised two schools in my community funding upgrades. These promises of \$9.8 million for Hampton Primary School and \$11.7 million for Gardenvale Primary School were ironclad commitments matched by the Liberal Party, yet after the election Labor broke their promises and have refused to provide the money in the budget. Only a pack of lying cheats would rip off children, and that is what the Labor Party is: a pack of lying cheats.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I ask you to apologise to the house for the use of inappropriate language.

James NEWBURY: I apologise.

Battle of the Coral Sea commemoration

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:55): On Sunday 5 May I had the honour of attending the commemoration service for the 82nd anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, representing the Minister for Veterans and the Victorian government. Members will be aware that the Battle of the Coral Sea, known as the battle that saved Australia, was a naval and aerial battle that was fought off the north-east coast of Australia from 4 to 8 May 1942, where United States and Australian naval forces intercepted a Japanese invasion force headed for Port Moresby. This action ultimately succeeded in preventing an invasion of Port Moresby thanks to the courage and sacrifice of the Australian and American servicemen involved. This commemoration service is held at the Shrine of Remembrance every year. It is organised by the Australian American Association of Victoria, and I want to acknowledge the commitment of its president Sam Muscat and vice-president Erin Muscat and their incredible work

that goes into hosting this event. This commemoration was attended by Mr Warren Sapir of the American ex-servicemen's association and consular representatives of both the United States and Japan, and a number of speakers remarked on the strong relationship and friendship that now exists between our three nations. Indeed it is an incredibly important strategic and economic partnership. I feel very lucky to have met Mr Bruce Crowl and his wife at the service. He is a World War II veteran, having served and fought on HMAS *Australia*. Like so many veterans to whom we owe so much, he is such a humble and gentle man. We will never forget their service and sacrifice.

Kew Hebrew Congregation

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:56): This month I had the pleasure of visiting the Kew Hebrew Congregation. Thank you to Rabbi Shmueli Feldman for his time as we discussed the rise of antisemitism and the impact on the local Jewish community as well as the history of the synagogue and its congregation. The Kew synagogue has serviced Kew's small but proud Jewish community since the mid 20th century. The main building is a testament to grand mid-century modern architecture, with beautiful stained-glass windows. Former Prime Minister and local federal MP Sir Robert Menzies laid the foundation stone of the site. Kew synagogue is a vital community centre for local Jewry, and I look forward to visiting again soon.

Boroondara Community Outreach

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:56): Last week was National Volunteer Week, when I had the pleasure of thanking Kew's local heroes. Among the many inspiring people and organisations in my electorate is Boroondara Community Outreach. BCO is a fantastic organisation dedicated to supporting individuals facing homelessness who are socially isolated and living with mental health challenges. Through their compassionate services they have provided countless people with the resources and support they need to live with dignity. Their commitment to fostering a sense of belonging and community is truly inspiring. Thank you to Nat, Lida and the wonderful BCO volunteers for all that you do. It was lovely to celebrate with you all last week. It truly does feel like an inspiring committee.

Camberwell Girls Grammar School

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:57): Last sitting week it was terrific to welcome grade 6 students from Camberwell Girls Grammar School into the Parliament. The girls asked some terrific questions, and I am looking forward to visiting the school soon for our civics discussion.

Budget 2024–25

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:57): It is always great to be able to make phone calls and meet with people to deliver good news, and following the recent state budget I was able to do just that. People in my electorate will now be able to safely cycle, scoot or walk across Laverton Creek, thanks to an overall package worth \$20 million that includes funding to construct a new bike and pedestrian path on Queen Street, Altona. It is a really vital thoroughfare, connecting Altona to Altona Meadows and beyond. It has been long recognised as needing a safe pathway for cyclists and pedestrians, and I thank the member for Point Cook and members of the community for their advocacy and support for this project

I was also delighted to be able to call the committee of Newport Storm FC to inform them that \$200,000 was allocated in the budget to upgrading their soccer nets, facilities and equipment at the club's home at AW Bond Reserve. The Altona Hockey Club pavilion will get rebuilt thanks to \$2.2 million, which we are contributing to the work the council is undertaking, and Leo Hoffman Reserve in Newport will see members of my community continue to stay active and healthy, with a new children's playground being constructed. The Westgate Punt ferry service will also continue. This week I was at Altona North Primary School with the Deputy Premier seeing the benefits of our Glasses for Kids program. See what I did there? A special shout-out to Mary and Aidan, school leaders who

greeted us and showed us around their fantastic school – true school leaders. Thank you very much for your hospitality.

Alexandra Park, Mornington

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (09:59): The other day I toured the almost completed Alexandra Park, Mornington, redevelopment with Mick and Johnno. Once finished this will be wonderful for Mornington Football Netball Club, Peninsula Raiders Superules Football Club, Mornington Cricket Club, the Bays and all users. The pavilion will be an amazing sports hub with state-of-the-art shared rehab and community facilities and will even have a bit of a balcony. And you never know, we might even get the member for Nepean coming along and maybe breaking another ankle or leg playing a footy game at the grounds. This project has been a long time coming. I originally started advocating with Greg Hunt along with Mick, Martin and the clubs from 2016 onwards, with funds announced when I was MP covering Mornington in 2019. Flinders MP Zoe McKenzie has since been elected and has done a great job to see this work through to fruition using these funds. A bit over five years later it is terrific to see this project nearly done.

National Volunteer Week

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (10:00): On another note, last week was National Volunteer Week. Thanks to all the volunteers who do a great job in the Mornington electorate and beyond, including all volunteers in the sports, arts, culture, environment and other spheres – and politics, with so many volunteers helping me in the past. Volunteering is the bedrock of our community and indeed there is no nobler exercise than reaching out and helping lift others up to make a difference. Once again, we thank you for your priceless service.

National Volunteer Week

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:00): I was very pleased to attend the Hume volunteers civic reception over the weekend to acknowledge some local hardworking volunteers as part of National Volunteer Week. I was particularly pleased to do this as Victoria's first minister for volunteers and to show my respect for our incredibly valued and important community members. As part of this celebration more than 120 volunteers were recognised and thanked for the time that they give to our community. This year's theme for National Volunteer Week was 'Something for Everyone', which asks all of us to explore the rich diversity of opportunities available through volunteering.

At the reception we heard from three fantastic volunteers: Eva Mazzel, a Gardens for Wildlife volunteer, Shayne Taylor from the SES and Megan Russell, who is part of the reconciliation action plan working group. Eva, Shayne and Megan spoke about not only the long-term benefits volunteering can have across the broader community but also just how important their experiences as volunteers have been in their personal journeys of growth and upskilling. I thank them for sharing their stories.

I am so pleased to see our hardworking local volunteers being recognised and celebrated for their contribution to our community. I know so many of our community members undertake volunteering roles. Our community is better thanks to them – from the CFA and the SES to every community sports club, the Craigieburn War Memorial and Remembrance Committee, local residents associations and so many more. As the local member for Kalkallo and Minister for Carers and Volunteers, I thank all those who give their time to benefit others in the community.

First Nations organisations

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (10:02): I rise to update the house on the vibrant and important work of First Peoples organisations that I witnessed just last week when I was on Gunnai/Kurnai country across Gippsland. Dala Yooro is a culturally strong kindergarten, a place for children and families to learn and grow. Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative was an incredible experience –

meeting all of the people there and in particular Logan Hudson, who is teaching language to Aboriginal children at the kinder and immersing them in culture, ensuring the children stay safe and happy and develop in their own identity.

The Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place not only holds many artefacts, including a recently repatriated bark canoe, it also holds important memories of families and communities and brings greater awareness to the strength of the Gunnai/Kurnai culture. Knob Reserve, a culturally significant place, has a landscape including six sacred trees, grinding grooves and artefacts scattered throughout the beautiful landscape. The Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust is filled with positive energy. There was such a great reception there. It was really good to see the refurbished facilities, and I look forward to delivering the new jetty that was committed to during the budget. Can I thank Wayne Hood and his team for hosting me.

Hume Central Secondary College

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:03): The Hume Central Secondary College *Cadenza* was a night for the senses, an incredible night of performances put together by local schools, including Reservoir Secondary, Mernda Central, Hume Grammar, Craigieburn Secondary, Overnewton, Gladstone Park Secondary and my old school Penola Catholic College. I would like to thank the teachers, volunteers and staff that ensure our students have opportunities to express themselves and show off their talents through the arts, and I particularly thank Jeff Mulcahy, Silvia Quaine, David Sutton, Emma Gardner, Andrew Shields, Daniel Luttick, Michael Smith, Rachel Gorman, Dave Bennel, Julian Addati, Andrew Whitmore, Ben Stivala, Matt Erickson, Rob Broomhead, Duncan Campbell and the Hume Central admin staff.

Glenroy College

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:04): Glenroy College is one of the most inclusive and welcoming schools I have had the pleasure to represent. They are leading the way in inclusive practices, and this week they unveiled the *Wurundjeri Welcoming Environment* collaborative art project at the school's entrance, making the school feel even more welcoming and safe for all – particularly important in this reconciliation week.

Ballerrt Mooroop site

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:04): I also had the pleasure of attending a celebration of culture at the precious Ballerrt Mooroop site on the weekend and had a great discussion with Wurundjeri and community elders and council on Monday about some of the exciting plans for the future of the site. I thank the generous Fawkner SES crew for feeding us all sausages with a smile and for all they do supporting our community.

National Volunteer Week

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:05): In recognition of volunteers week I also want to give a big shout-out to volunteers, who give so much of themselves, their time and their talents for the betterment of others and in particular the huge number of volunteers locally who are involved in food relief and organisations like El Rahman, who are helping make sure our new arrivals from Palestine have the help and resources they need to settle here.

Jillian Burt

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:05): Congratulations to Forest Street Primary School principal Jillian Burt on achieving the incredible milestone of 50 years in public education. Jill is an outstanding educator and leader who has made a huge contribution to the lives of generations of students, teachers, support staff and the Forest Street school community over the last 30 years. Jill also worked at Grevillea Park Primary School, now known as Yuille Park Community College, for eight years and other schools around Ballarat and Geelong. I want to thank Jill for her passion for education,

her dedication to her students, her commitment to the primary school community and her fierce advocacy for Forest Street Primary School.

John Furness

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:06): Ballarat lost a good man when Reverend John Furness died on 18 May, a man I deeply admired and whose friendship I enjoyed. I wish to offer my deepest sympathies to his children Sharon, Greg, Michael; Michael's wife Sara; his grandchildren Taylor and Ashleigh; and his great grandchildren Ella, Grace and Annie. John's life personified service to others, demonstrated by his 40 years as a minister for the Uniting Church, including minister at St Andrews Kirk and chaplain at Ballarat Clarendon College. I particularly want to recognise John's contribution to the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia's Ballarat sub-branch, Ballarat Legacy, the Ballarat Air Force Association and the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial. John was a gentle man who was kind, empathetic and compassionate and who provided spiritual support to many. Vale, Reverend John Furness.

Water policy

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:06): I would like to thank the Minister for Water, the fabulous Harriet Shing, for coming down to Tyabb to talk all things water. In fact we were talking recycled water. At the moment we have 350 megalitres being pumped out at Gunnamatta Beach, and we need to do better. We need to use that for our farmers.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:07): I move:

That the consideration of government business, notice of motion 1, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:07): I am pleased to kick off on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024, which is a rather curious piece of legislation, if I may say, in many respects, and I will come to some of the detail of that as I go through my contribution today. The government has made the decision to repeal the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and it effectively did that in the budget last year.

To go to a little bit of background, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation was established in 2011 under the then Liberals and Nationals government by my colleague the member for Malvern, and its role was to undertake a number of things. It was to look at prevention of gambling harm and promotion of the risks of gambling harm and to undertake research in particular into gambling harm and how it can best be avoided. As the member for Malvern reminded me this morning, it was modelled on the VicHealth model, which was set up in the 1980s, as members would be aware, for a range of reasons but one of them being to ensure that the government of the day had access to alternative voices and that there was to at least some degree a bipartisan approach to health promotion and ill health prevention in Victoria. The VRGF was set up to effectively do the same sort of thing but with respect to gambling and prevention of gambling harm.

As I said, that has been a bipartisan position up until now. I think three members of Parliament have been on the VRGF since it was established, and it has done an admirable job in ensuring that there is promotion of the ills of letting gambling get control of your life, in undertaking research and in helping those, through particularly the Gambler's Help program and its various subcontractors, who are experiencing gambling harm. Indeed the VRGF categorises gambling harm into seven forms, being financial harm; relationship disruption, conflict or breakdown; emotional or psychological distress; decrements to health, which is an interesting term – obviously impacts on your personal health; cultural harm; reduced work or study performance; and criminal activity. There is no doubt that there is significant harm caused by gambling in all forms in Victoria, whether that is through electronic gaming machines (EGM); punting on horse, dog or harness racing; sports betting, which has become an increasingly prevalent issue, particularly the blooming of online betting operating right around the country; or many other forms of gambling that can take hold of people's lives.

I was pleased to be part of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, as I have been for a number of years now. We did a review last year of a number of Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) reports into how the state manages gambling harm, and in that summary report of the report that PAEC produced there is some information on gambling harm that I think is interesting. It says:

A relationship between gambling and family violence has been established. Gambling can be both the impetus and the outcome of family violence. Similarly, there is a link between gambling and suicide, with a total of 184 gambling-related suicides occurring in Victoria between 2009 and 2016.

It goes on to say:

Gambling harm disproportionately affects those experiencing social and economic disadvantage, while culturally and linguistically diverse communities highlighted their unique vulnerabilities to gambling harm.

We had a number of different cultural groups come forward to that committee, and in particular I think the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association gave some interesting evidence on the impact in that particular cultural group. The report goes on to say:

Gambling amongst young people is increasingly normalised.

We had a youth round table as part of that inquiry, and the youth round table participants shared some of their experiences. The report goes on to say:

The financial consequences of gambling can be substantial. Gambling player losses in Victoria totalled \$7.5 billion in 2022–23. Losses from electronic gaming machines constitute the largest losses in Victoria but losses from online gambling are the fastest growing. The Victorian Government raised \$2.5 billion from gambling taxes in 2022–23 and gambling tax revenue accounted for 7.6% of total revenue collected in the same year.

Those comments and statistics outline the significance of gambling harm in our community, but I would also add that the VRGF found in 2018–19 in a report that 0.7 per cent of adult Victorians suffered from a gambling disorder compared to 69 per cent of all Victorians participating in gambling. So the principle that has always guided me and I believe has guided the Liberals and Nationals is that we need to address issues with problem gambling and we need to minimise the harm that comes from gambling, but it is important to note that statistic of just 0.7 per cent of adult Victorians suffering from a gambling disorder, so it is a very small cohort. Most of us can go into a gaming venue, put 50 bucks in the machine, win, lose, draw, withdraw and get out and get on with our lives. Most of us can have a punt on the horses, whether it is spring carnival or whether it is others who get into it more seriously, and we can maintain our losses. But there is a very small cohort for whom gambling becomes an addiction, and it is certainly an issue that we need to be focusing our resources on.

So it was that the Liberals and Nationals were very proud to establish the VRGF in 2011. It was done for a number of reasons, as I said. It was to establish in particular a model similar to the VicHealth model. One of the issues that I have learned through the research on this particular legislation, though, of course, is that removing the research function into gambling and prevention of gambling into a

statutory authority was a deliberate design of the VRGF, to take that research arm away from the department and away from the government of the day and give it an independent bent.

So VRGF funding is funnelled to multiple different researchers across the state and across the country and into different programs as to how we can prevent gambling harm. As I said, that was very deliberately done to ensure the independence of that research but also to avoid the perception of any influence, particularly from a department where it is making policy or from a government of the day that is making policy with respect to gaming.

So it is that the decision to abolish the VRGF raises some concerns for us. In particular, if I go back to the history, previously governments have funded the VRGF on a four-year cycle, so in the state budget last year when there was only one year's funding provided for the VRGF our antenna was raised. I asked the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation at the time whether the government was abolishing the VRGF, and she simply answered, 'Well, that's a matter for a future government decision.' Clearly the decision had already been made at that stage and was confirmed a month or two later when the minister and the then Premier announced a full suite of measures, on 16 July, making a range of changes to gambling legislation and regulation in Victoria, including that the VRGF would be abolished.

What I am concerned about with that in particular is the justification for the abolition of the VRGF. We heard from the minister last week at PAEC that there has been considerable work put into – and we can see it in the second-reading speech – establishing a new model and that there has been lots of consultation with the sector, with the VRGF staff, with researchers and all that sort of thing. But generally when a government makes a decision to abolish an organisation or a statutory authority in particular, there is a review, there is an analysis of some description, of that or some catalyst for it to be abolished. An example in this space is the reform and the abolition of the VCGLR, the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation. It was abolished in light of the Crown royal commission findings, which effectively found, if I can summarise, that it had been asleep at the wheel. So there was a very clear purpose for abolishing that commission and establishing the new Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission.

There has not been a similar case made for the abolition of the VRGF. There were no recommendations in the Crown royal commission about VRGF. There were no recommendations in the various VAGO reports that the VRGF had failed substantially and should be abolished or reformed. There were not even, in the review of the VAGO reports by PAEC that I mentioned earlier, any recommendations that suggested that VRGF should be abolished, although by the time its work was concluded on that report the decision had already been made. Whilst there were certainly recommendations from the Auditor-General and from PAEC about how the VRGF could do its job better, there was no recommendation to abolish it and there was no recommendation that the system was broken and the model was broken.

Last week in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee estimates hearings I actually asked the minister. I asked on what advice or analysis that decision was made – that decision being the decision to abolish VRGF. I got a non-answer, I guess you could say. The minister responded:

As you can appreciate, the VRGF – and I really want to thank them for their work. It is an organisation that has been going for more than 12 years, but as they recognised themselves, it was originally designed to be a responsible gambling foundation, which was about providing those counselling services but also the education services and research. We have moved on in terms of how we are now looking at it and looking at it in a much more multidisciplinary way to deliver those wraparound support services.

So clearly nothing in that answer suggests there has been a review of the VRGF. I pushed the issue a bit. I said:

The question is: what advice or analysis was undertaken? Was there a review of the VRGF that indicated that it should be wound up?

The minister again responded:

There has been much work that has gone into that. It has been subject to extensive consultation with the sector, with industry and with the foundation itself.

But again the minister did not answer the question, and the question was: was a review actually undertaken? The answer is clearly no. This is one of the things that concern me in this legislation. The government has not made a case and indeed has not even attempted to make a case as to why the VRGF will be abolished.

At that point I would like to go into what this bill actually does, the bones of it. It is only quite a short bill, because it simply abolishes the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 and makes some other amendments to send some roles to the VGCCC. In place of the VRGF the government says it will direct client-facing prevention functions, including Gambler's Help, to the Department of Health. The justification for that is that it is on the basis that there are significant comorbidities with problem gambling and that they often come with mental health issues, with alcohol and drug issues and, as I mentioned earlier, with family violence. That is true. It will send gambling harm awareness and prevention programs to the VGCCC, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, and the policy research and evaluation functions of the VRGF will go to the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS). That raises again significant concerns for me. This is effectively going back to the old model that we had before the VRGF, which led to the concerns and led to the VRGF being established.

I have had a read closely of course of the second-reading speech, and there are in fact seven times where the second-reading speech uses the words 'integration', 'joined up', 'more integrated service', 'will enable better integration', 'improving service integration', 'a more holistic approach' and 'better coordinate services'. I put to you and to the house that going from one organisation that is responsible for all of those issues – that prevention of gambling harm, the provision of Gambler's Help assistance to individuals, the promotion and the messaging more broadly to the community about the risk of gambling harm and those research functions that currently sit within VRGF – and sending them three ways, in no way to me and to the Liberals and Nationals suggests better integration of how we handle problem gambling.

In concert with the government's failure to actually say or provide any evidence that the VRGF is not doing its job, that leads us to significant concerns. There are a number of these that I will now go through. I have mentioned that the government has not made the case that the VRGF has not been successful. I believe that sending these roles off in three different directions will lead to a haphazard and uncoordinated approach.

With respect to the Gambler's Help and client-facing prevention functions being sent to the Department of Health, there are some concerns outside just what we are saying. Obviously, as the Shadow Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation I consulted widely with the industry, with experts and with those involved in non-government organisations trying to prevent gambling harm, and one comment I got back was from Mark Zirnsak from Uniting, who said that when those activities were previously in the Department of Health they were 'neglected' and may again 'get lower priority'. That is the concern that I have. While it can be argued, as the government is arguing, that sending those health and prevention and Gambler's Help activities to the Department of Health helps coordinate with other health issues, the reality is it is going into a department with a budget of something like \$27 billion and a whole lot of problems that we already know about very widely in this state. We know that with respect to hospitals we are about to see a massive change in the way the government operates, and as a result I am very concerned that sending this activity to the Department of Health will again see it get neglected and not given the treatment that it deserves.

With respect to sending some of the roles to the VGCCC, gambling harm awareness and prevention programs will go to the VGCCC. The VGCCC is a regulator, and that is what it should be doing. The lesson that this chamber should have learned from the Crown royal commission is that a regulator has

got to be focused on its job of being a regulator, whether that is of the casino, whether that is of EGM venues or of the wagering and betting system – all of those things the regulator should be focused on. It should not be focused on undertaking advertising campaigns.

The inconsistency of the argument that we are getting from the government is highlighted again in the discussion we had at PAEC last week on this issue when the government was asked about how the VGCCC will undertake its functions in doing that gambling harm prevention and promotion activity. The CEO Annette Kimmitt basically said to PAEC that we are inheriting a number of the programs, things like the Love the Game program, which has been running for some time through the VRGF, but they are going to develop a new five-year strategy. She said:

So we are going to be working together with Health –

as in the department –

with the department and the research arm of the department to develop – as soon as VRGF join us – a five-year strategy for transforming community sentiment ...

She went on to say:

... we have got a great opportunity to work together with Health and with DJCS on devising a new five-year strategy with that fabulous funding that we have been given to do that.

If the VGCCC has been given this role separate to the Department of Health, and the government has made the decision to allocate it away from health and from the Department of Justice and Community Safety, why then is the organisation now starting to coordinate with them again? That would suggest that perhaps the system as it was was actually correct in the first place, because it was all held together in one statutory authority. I found that comment confusing in light of what the government is actually trying to do. On the one hand we are sending gambling harm prevention in three separate directions, and then one of those directions is coming back to the other two and saying, 'Let's work together.' It is quite bizarre in that respect. We think particularly in light of the Crown royal commission that the VGCCC should be absolutely focused on regulation. It has given every indication that it is red-hot on regulating both the casino and other players in the market in Victoria, but we are concerned that it should maintain its focus as a regulator.

Sending the research function to the Department of Justice and Community Safety again raises a concern that I indicated earlier. One of the reasons that the VRGF was set up in the first place was to remove that perception, or reality, of influence over the research program by a department that is also the policymaker and by a government that is also the policymaker. That was highlighted again through our consultation on this bill. Monash University's Dr Charles Livingstone, who also presented as a witness to the PAEC inquiry last year, said it is 'a major concern' that research may be bent to the 'short-term policy interests of the department'. That I certainly agree with. That is, as I said, why the VRGF was set up in the first place, to ensure that research could operate with a bucket of money given to it by the government but at arm's length from the government with bipartisan board members that could work on what are the really key things that need to be done without any influence from the department, without any influence from the government of the day. That is our other concern.

There are a couple more things that have raised our concern with this. The other parts of the bill are the abolition of the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council, sometimes known as RGMAC, and the Liquor Control Advisory Council. These, I am told, have not met respectively since 2020 and 2021, but they are being abolished. They are statutory advisory bodies now, both under legislation, and they are both being abolished. The government quite openly says that they are not going to be replaced because the government wants to be flexible around stakeholder engagement to ensure it is fit for purpose for the times.

That could also be code for, 'We'll talk to who we want to talk to, and we won't listen to the people that we don't want to listen to.' I think that the government just abolishing these organisations is consistent with what is happening in various other aspects of legislation in this Parliament at the

moment, where a number of statutory advisory bodies are being abolished. One argument for that is flexibility. Another argument is, 'We don't want to listen to who we don't want to listen to.' That is a concern.

My final concern with this legislation is in respect to funding. When the bill was brought forward and the government announced the decision to give only one year's funding to VRGF last year I did wonder whether this was in fact a financial decision. But we have seen from the budget that indeed the same amount of money – indeed a little bit more money than has been provided over four years in the past – has been allocated to these new roles, this new model that the government is establishing. I might say that the money is \$165 million, allocated to the department of justice, which then somehow within the wheels of government will be reallocated to VGCCC and the Department of Health. Although the minister in PAEC last week gave a breakdown of how that will be reallocated, it is not clear to this chamber exactly how that occurs when the funding has been given to the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Nonetheless the concern is that ultimately when the funding is not being given to a statutory authority it is going into departmental funds and will be at the whim of future departmental trimming here and there. So there is uncertainty as to whether there will be ongoing funding, as I said at the start. VRGF had always been funded in four-year blocks by both sides of politics until last year, and there is nothing in this bill or indeed in government announcements or policy announcements that would suggest that that will still be the case in four years time. My concern is that the roles become absorbed into the base funding for DJCS, for the Department of Health and potentially even for the VGCCC, and we lose firstly that transparency but particularly the prospect of the actual funding continuing. All of this raises the concern as to why we are doing this when there is no evidence that the VRGF has not been doing its job. There are concerns at least from our side as to how a new model being spread across three different organisations and departments will actually be better than having it focused in one integrated group, as it is now.

You do wonder whether perhaps this is simply a political angle, whether this is just a little bit of a political attempt by the government to trash the legacy of the former Liberals and Nationals government and remove something that we established in this space. There are hints about that. The minister's second-reading speech says with respect to the justification for the historical structure that we have:

For example, the importance of engaging with people with lived and living experience was not considered when the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council and Liquor Control Advisory Council were established.

Who said? Who said lived experience was not considered? That just seems to me to be a justification, and a fairly flimsy one, for abolishing those two advisory councils but also a broader question for the VRGF.

I think the fact that we are debating this legislation now also speaks to the arrogance of the government. The government has already made the decision to get rid of the VRGF. The action is in train to move staff within those three different agencies and departments that I mentioned. Funding has been allocated straight to the Department of Justice and Community Safety, but this legislation has not been passed by the Parliament and has not been approved by the people of Victoria. So I think that is very arrogant of the government to do so.

Not only the arrogance but the haphazard nature of all this I think is best exemplified by a couple of very minor matters – minor but perhaps important. I note the statement of compatibility that was tabled along with the second-reading speech for this legislation by the minister in fact calls this legislation the Gambling Legislation Amendment (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Other Matters) Bill 2024. Indeed when I sent this out to my colleagues that is the title I gave it because that was the piece of paper I had in front of me. Then when I opened the bill I found that actually it is called the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024.

So the government has got the wrong title on the statement of compatibility that goes with this legislation, which goes to the point of: who is running this show? Really, who is running this show? We do not even have consistency in the title of the bill, and that makes me think that this has been thrown together – that a decision has been made to abolish the VRGF and then they have had to come up with a model after that.

I think I could go further, because as we know, this bill abolishes the VRGF and abolishes the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council and the Liquor Control Advisory Council and yet the bill itself is called the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. It is my submission to you that the word ‘repeal’ in fact should go after ‘advisory councils’, which are also being repealed. Look, they are minor issues, but I know when I looked around the other side there were some furrowed brows when I raised those issues, because the members opposite thought, ‘Oh, my God, what are we dealing with here? We can’t even get the names of the bill right.’

Colin Brooks interjected.

Danny O’BRIEN: The Minister for Development Victoria at the table says he was not listening. That probably highlights the point. The government has not really been paying attention.

In summary, there are broader reforms to come. The government, when it announced the abolishment of the VRGF, made some significant changes, and I will have a lot more to say about those in the future, but we still do not have, almost a year after the government announced those changes on 16 July, a timeline for when those reforms will be introduced. I asked the minister last week whether she had one, and she could not give me an answer. Indeed the technical reference group to look at the changes to the electronic gaming machines has still not even met, so one wonders what the government is doing.

But as I said, we are concerned that the government has not made the case to abolish the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. It has not argued adequately as to how sending problem gambling harm in three different directions will actually help the problem gambler. We can only assume that this is indeed a political decision, one perhaps driven by something internal, and we do not really know what it might be. But as a result the Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting this bill; indeed we will be opposing it. We do not think it delivers the response to gambling harm that we need here in this state.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:37): I rise to speak on this very important bill. As many in the house know, I am one of those people who have been significantly impacted by gambling harm, and I speak every time on our gambling bills because reducing stigma remains the most important thing that I can offer in this place so that people understand the reality. I am deeply saddened to hear that the opposition will not be supporting this bill. As someone who has lived through significant gambling harm and needed those services and needed those supports, I think that this government and our minister have done me incredibly proud in the work that they have done in the reform space. We have not seen reform like this for many, many years.

I am, as I said, very saddened to hear that the other side will not support this bill. I was a little bit distressed to hear that the semantics and labels of bills seemed to matter more to the other side than the families and the people that are going through these very difficult times. The name of the bill to me is less important than the focus on those communities. Within his opening address the member for Gippsland South did acknowledge, I think his words were, ‘the blooming of online betting’, and I think it is important to understand that a government needs to continue to address an issue like this as it evolves. I know the Deputy Speaker himself has an interest in many of the ways that that has evolved in gaming and so forth. These reforms – we cannot sit on our hands and just leave the legislation as it is. We need to be active and proactive in this space.

I find particularly offensive the suggestion that these reforms are in any way politically motivated. I can assure you that I have met with the minister on many, many occasions and her deep commitment to addressing gambling harm is there and across government. Many things have been raised as issues: they said that there is a fundamental misunderstanding about what integrated services are all about. We know that comorbidity is a feature of gambling harm, so 30 per cent of people that present with mental health or AOD issues also have a gambling issue. When we talk about 'integrated', it is about making sure that we can support and find those people across all of the services. Indeed I was delighted to have funded a program which looked at how we can better have primary caregivers identify some of those issues.

The most extraordinary line I think that came from the member for Gippsland South in this debate was to suggest that that there was no evidence that it was not doing its job. That is a fairly extraordinary statement given what the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report found, and I do remember when I read the VAGO report being very distressed reading that. In fact it was really about getting the money out there, that there was no research done on the impacts. If that is not a failure of you doing your job – to not actually work out whether those systems and those programs are working or not working – that would seem to me to be a fundamental failure in the system. The member for Gippsland South suggested that there had been no review done on the repeal of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF), but I would put to him that a VAGO report from our Auditor-General is a pretty serious review to be put through and then indeed to be followed up by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. One of the things that came out of the PAEC review was that of the eight recommendations put by VAGO, only one of those recommendations had been instituted. After the VAGO report we had another review by PAEC, and PAEC found that indeed only one recommendation had been addressed. I would say that that is a fairly serious review process, which said that it was not functioning.

I do want to give a shout-out to the VRGF. It did have its place, but its anachronism is in its very name. The responsible gambling foundation is not appropriate in these times. It is a victim-blaming term to talk about 'responsible gambling'. It suggests that people that are in the grip of addiction are in some way irresponsible. The very name of the foundation speaks to the time it was established and the way that we viewed gambling in those days. It is important that we continue to move and to develop systems that will address the new and emerging issues in the gambling frame, like online gambling.

One of the other objections that came from the other side, and why they will not support a bill to assist gambling families, was in relation to the research. It is understanding that the research needs to be across a range of portfolios, again because we have the comorbidities. I would also like to point out that one of the findings from the VAGO report was that the VRGF were not even using their own research in the development of their programs. So I ask those on the other side to consider whether they really do think that that research process was working under the VRGF. Certainly PAEC found that indeed it was not working.

With regard to the funding issues, which the member spoke about, it will be first dibs of the hypothecated account, which is a community fund, which will always go to gambling. I know that the development programs will continue to be funded throughout, so we have guaranteed the rest of them for three years.

I can assure you that the commitment of this minister, me and this government will always be to support gamblers and their families. Let us not forget how many families and people are impacted. Those on the other side might seek to minimise this and tell us that it is just 0.7 per cent. I would say two things to you, having been one of those 0.7 per cent. It is not a light or insignificant thing. The trauma that has gone through my family, my children – it was last night I spoke to my 22-year-old son, and he was still trying to work his way through the impact that my ex-husband's gambling had on our family. So you might like to diminish 0.7, but I stand in support of that 0.7.

I would also ask you to consider that one in five people are at risk of gambling harm. I was meeting with Child and Family Services Ballarat, a wonderful support service in Ballarat, just the other day with a woman called Jo, who delivers into schools, and she was describing the difficulties of getting kids to understand in this day and age what gambling is. We have such a gaming community that then can so easily develop into gambling, and that was her important role there. So while those on the other side might think that 0.7 per cent of people are not worth looking after, I do, and I certainly do the one in five –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on the question of debating the issue, nowhere did I diminish the fact there were 0.7 per cent of people. I did not diminish the people involved; I said it was a very small group.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gippsland South, I can rule on the point of order. It is not a point of order; it is a matter for debate.

Michaela SETTLE: And I find it offensive to have my family relegated to a small group. Without question this government has worked long and hard in these gambling reforms, and I have stood by and am very proud of what our minister has delivered. We have already seen a tranche go through Parliament. That saw some really important reforms around the times that venues could open. Finally, with response to the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission being involved, I would like to point out that that is with industry. I commend this bill.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:47): I am delighted to rise and make a few comments on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation bill. It is actually called the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024, and when I say 'delighted to rise' I am disappointed that they are repealing this act, because we know Labor cannot manage money and Victorians are paying the price. Getting rid of the VRGF, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, is just yet another example of cutting and running from some of the services that we need here in Victoria, particularly for the vulnerable and those who have gambling problems.

I note the member for Eureka told her personal stories, and I respect those stories, but at the same time we need to continue to support people with gambling problems. I think the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation was the ideal service, the ideal mode, to make sure that those services actually made it to the ground. We talk about waste and mismanagement by this government and the way that debt is going up. Something has to give. They will not stop building tunnels and they will not stop overpaying contractors, but 'Let's tighten the belt for average Victorians and let's cut and run from some of the services and make vulnerable Victorians even more vulnerable.'

The VRGF has been in place since 2011. I was pleased to be on that board for over 10 years, and we oversaw the strategic direction of the VRGF and we crosschecked many of the programs and understood the services that they were delivering. I think the VRGF did an enormous job in supporting people with gambling problems. There is no doubt that the results were achieved and that it helped people. It was a backstop for people with gambling problems. The member for Malvern put this in place. It was funded at the rate of \$150 million over a four-year term – \$37.5 million a year. When you look at the gambling revenue in Victoria – I think the member for Gippsland South said it is \$2.5 billion a year in revenue – \$37.5 million a year on the VRGF is a drop in the ocean in terms of being able to fund it and support that small part of the population who do have gambling problems. I think this bill repealing the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation is a poor move, and I am just disappointed that they have chosen to go this way.

We know that there are plenty of ways to have a punt in Victoria, whether it is on the horses, the dogs, the harness, the pokies or even Crown, and we have seen that revenue stream. It is substantial, and I say I am more than happy for gambling to continue in Victoria. I love a punt myself; many do. Whether it is at spring carnival or whether it is on a Saturday on the horses or whatever it might be, we enjoy a punt. It is legal, it is a way of life and it is a great industry that, with the food and beverage industry, is

a great way for people to enjoy a lifestyle. But there are some who do not handle it well, so for Pete's sake we need to have those safety harnesses in place, and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation was one of those harnesses. We need that wraparound support for problem gamblers, because we know behind every problem gambler there is a family, and that family will suffer from the financial stress and other stresses that go with problem gambling. So I think we should be investing more in supporting those people rather than taking money out of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

To be honest, we just do not trust this government. We have seen before that they will say, 'We're changing the name. We're going to make these changes. We're going to do this, we're going to do that.' Let us just watch this space. Two or three years down the track that \$37.5 million or \$150 million over four years will get withered away before we know it, and it will be interesting to see what happens with the number of problem gamblers. I hope it does not go up, but at the same time, if we are going to withdraw funds, I think that we need to keep an eye on what that figure is, because it could go up without the support that we currently get, and with the government wielding the axe on programs like this we will all pay the price somewhere down the track.

Problem gambling leads to many other problems, as we know. Sometimes it is crime, sometimes it is substance abuse, and it has other effects on families of course – financial concerns – and life goes off track. The VRGF prides itself on early intervention and certainly providing assistance to those in troubled times, and now that rug is being pulled out from underneath them.

The gambling revenue, as I said before – \$2.5 billion – is massive. With what we have got nowadays on our phones and our iPads, whether it is an app from Neds, Sportsbet, TAB, Ladbrokes or Bet365, there are just so many opportunities now to be betting or gambling. Problem gambling can only go up with the amount of people that have easy access to it. Once upon a time, we all know, you had to go to the TAB and fill out a ticket to have a punt. Nowadays it can happen at any given time on any given day. So instead of taking funds out of problem gambling services we need to invest more and more.

The government cannot compete with the amount of ads that are on TV encouraging people to have a punt, encouraging people to download an app. Whether it is in the newspaper, whether it is on Facebook or however that is, the government cannot compete. So the best thing we can do is, through the VRGF, make sure we have programs in place and support programs and design ads and other ways to make people think about their gambling situation and decide whether it is the right thing for them.

We used to talk as board members about needing more dollars, not less. We need more programs, more advertising messages and more help, but what is happening now is, as I said, pulling the rug out from under problem gamblers. I think it is going to do more harm than good. Just sending people to a helpline is not always the answer. Sometimes it is those messages. We produce those ads that talk about problem gambling. We see ads that show people standing in the supermarket with no money left in the account because somebody has used it for gambling. Those ads really hit home to some families and sometimes shame gamblers into thinking about what they have been doing, playing that guilt card, and force gamblers to consider their families.

Without the VRGF, who will take responsibility to oversee the big picture and make sure that the battler and the person with a gambling problem is looked after? As I say, the member for Malvern, who is in the chamber now, put this together – the VRGF – back in 2011, and I think it has been very successful. Sometimes I wonder – because it was not Labor's idea, I am surprised that it lasted as long as it did. Because it is not their idea, it cannot be any good. We have managed to hang in there for 10 years under Labor, but now, as I say, time is up, and they are going to move on from it. I know the member for Gippsland South as the Shadow Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation will certainly keep his finger on the pulse in terms of the number of problem gamblers, and whether that goes up or down. We certainly do not want it to go up; do not get me wrong for a moment. But when you take services away from vulnerable people, there is every chance that those numbers will increase.

I suspect some families who are victims, and we have heard from some of those in the chamber today, people who have had family members with gambling problems – although they stand there on that side of the chamber and say, ‘We’re helping; we’re not taking things away, we’re just changing things.’ Well, as I say, we do not trust the government. A change usually means a budget cut. It means money is leaving the services for problem gamblers. I think that we need to keep our eye on where this goes, because over time there is more and more gambling occurring because of the devices that we all carry, the apps and how easy it is to gamble. As I say, I have nothing against people having a punt – I think it is ideal; I think it is terrific. But for those with a problem, we need to make sure those services are in place, and as I said, the VRGF did that very well. We invested heavily. We could have invested more, but we did invest heavily in good, strong advertisements and sometimes playing that guilt card, as I said, to make sure problem gamblers start to have a look at themselves and think about their families. I just hope that as we move forward there are other systems in place. We often hear that there will be systems, but the proof will be in the pudding, and I certainly hope that is the case.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:58): I too rise to make a contribution on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024, and I do, at the outset, acknowledge the contribution of my colleague and my good friend the member for Eureka. People who come to our chamber and who speak so meaningfully and so poignantly from a place of lived experience, regardless of what side of the chamber they are on, will always have my deepest and my utmost respect. It was very, very difficult for the member for Eureka to be able to put her points forward, but can I just say that the member for Eureka has been putting these points forward since the very beginning of her term in the 59th Parliament. It was a part of her inaugural speech. I have been in solidarity all the way with the member for Eureka when it comes to gambling reform in this state, but when you go back some six years ago, can I just say that there has been some significant reform in the state – some really significant reform.

The member for Eureka spoke about how she hops up on her feet each and every single time some reform around gambling in this state has come about. I can tell you, because I keep a very, very watchful eye when it comes to gambling reform in this state, that she would have popped up on her feet some seven times in fact. Most of those times when reform is being put forward it is opposed by the opposition, even in the face of excellent groups like the Alliance for Gambling Reform, who are supportive of these changes that we are putting through.

I am very supportive also of the work that the Alliance for Gambling Reform do, because a long time ago they recognised that gambling, firstly, disproportionately affects people in lower socio-economic communities, like those in Cranbourne, like those in Narre Warren South. But they also recognised that it is a public health issue, and when it is a public health issue you have got to find the areas of the public service that are just going to best be able to address that. They have long been advocates for public health reforms that are evidence-based but also community-based, and their sole purpose, their sole reason for being – I almost went the French version then – is to reduce and to prevent gambling harm. Lock, stock and barrel, this government has been only ever putting reforms forward, particularly since the beginning of the 59th Parliament, to ensure that we get to that place. There was a press release that came from the Alliance for Gambling Reform this morning that said they are supportive of this bill. Of course they are saying that more can be done, and I think those of us who want to see gambling harm reform continue, again, are very supportive of that notion. But they do acknowledge the significance of this bill, and they acknowledge the good that it is doing and that it builds a further foundation of work that can be done.

The bill itself will improve the public health approach to gambling harm by implementing the new gambling harm prevention and response model, and it aims to improve on the model of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. It will do so by creating better connections between gambling health services, harm research and prevention and other coexisting conditions experienced by people with lived or living experience of gambling harm. The amendment aims to improve on prevention and response and gambling harm minimisation by better recognising its interwoven nature with health.

The amendments in this bill improve the way gambling harm is addressed, providing an updated and matured model. It is an important step in gambling harm minimisation – an issue, as I have said, I have really advocated a very long time for. Again, I am very proud of our government for continuing to strengthen our harm minimisation reforms.

Last year I had an intern in my office, and he did a tremendous piece of work on a report into electronic gaming usage in Narre Warren South. That intern, Jack Keating, was a student from Melbourne Uni, and the report focused very heavily on electronic gaming machine usage in a suburban and socio-economic disadvantage context. The report found what we all know: there is above-average density of electronic gaming machines in my electorate in Narre Warren South, which has one of the highest annual player expenditures. I could not believe that households averaged about \$1000 of gaming losses per annum – that is, each and every household, on average, in my electorate has losses of a thousand bucks per annum. The report also found high accessibility of those machines in my suburbs.

More work can be done – we know that. But the previous reforms announced by our government have ensured that the gambling industry has a much stronger oversight. Gambling reforms introduced in 2023 were a great step by the Labor government. The reforms included load-up limits reduced from \$1000 to \$100 and mandatory closure periods for those electronic gaming machines. I know that these reforms will impact people in a very positive way in my community of Narre Warren South. Gambling does not just hurt people's finances, as we have heard from the member for Eureka, it can also impact their relationships, and the trauma can be long lasting. It has impacts on people's relationships, jobs, health and wellbeing. The impact of gambling is holistic, so we need a holistic response. This new model of service delivery will retain functions from the foundation as well as address key weaknesses. Services such as therapeutic gambling counselling, community-based gambling harm prevention and the delivery of support to gaming venues will be continued, but under this bill the new model will focus on addressing the referral pathways between Gambler's Help local services and Victoria's other health, family violence and alcohol or drug services.

We know that gambling harm is a big issue. Whether related to their own or someone else's gambling, more than half a million Victorians experience gambling harm each year. It is often concurrent with other factors, such as declining mental health, increased use of alcohol or drugs and higher rates of family violence. The new model, informed by stakeholder engagement, aims to integrate gambling harm into other referral pathways in health and social services. This will help to reduce the stigma around gambling and make it part of other primary care services.

People who experience gambling harm are so often those who can least afford it, and our Allan Labor government is really serious about supporting Victorians who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing gambling harm. This year's budget commits \$165 million of funding to these functions over four years, and that is a record investment in prevention and response. We know that this is better than banning gambling altogether; that would only push gambling further underground and make it a breeding ground for organised crime. To improve outcomes for those with lived or living experience, the strengthening of oversight will increase education, support services and underpin reform to reduce gambling harm. I would like to again acknowledge the member for Eureka for her excellent contribution, and I would like to commend the bill to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:08): I rise to make some comments on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024 and say at the outset that we are opposing this bill. I want to acknowledge the work of the member for Gippsland South for what he has done in investigating the bill. I can say that he has done his homework, unlike those opposite, who demonstrate that this has been rushed through. We even see in the statement of compatibility that they have got the wrong title of the actual bill. This is a government that clearly never does its homework.

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: It is very easy to interject, but it never, ever does its homework. To think with an issue as important as problem gambling that they would literally just rush something through without any work, any detail. All they are going to do is cause more issues to an area that absolutely needs more focus. This side of the house very proudly has been working to help those that have issues around problem gambling and comorbidity issues surrounding problem gamblers, including drug and alcohol problems and including family violence issues. This is a major, major, major concern for our state.

I want to congratulate the member for Malvern for his work in initially establishing the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation when he was the Minister for Gaming. For 13 years we had the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I know the member for Ovens Valley is in the chamber as well – he and I both sat on the inaugural board along with Ian Trezise, the former member for Geelong. The three of us, in a very bipartisan way, sat on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation board to make sure that problem gamblers and those issues were put first and foremost in a centralised, organised, non-bureaucratic way, led by research, focused on research and ultimately implementing policies that would make a difference.

And what does this government do? They slash and burn. That is what this government does. They say, ‘You know what, we’re not going to focus on problem gambling in this state’ – which we know is a huge issue – ‘We’re just going to take the money and throw it into a whole lot of agencies,’ so we can never again see what is actually spent in this area going forward and ultimately what work has been done.

The great benefit of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation was each and every year, like every other independent group, they would have an annual report and you could look at the work that had been done. Partnerships were formed, like with the North Melbourne Football Club and other sporting organisations, that got footballers and people in different sporting codes, community clubs and multicultural groups that all had issues in their communities around problem gambling working with them and got them as spokespeople to address the situation to ensure problem gambling does not happen again.

One of the things that the member for Ovens Valley and I did in the very first period was go around and visit some of these gaming areas and see them firsthand. I will never forget going on a Friday afternoon to Crown Casino and talking to a guy that was playing blackjack and him telling me that he had just lost the weekly wage that he was meant to take home to his family on the table. He had just lost his wage, and he then had to go home and explain to his family, to his wife, what he had done. There is no question that he was one of many problem gamblers that we have in our state, and that is why it is so important that we address problem gambling. We know we have a state that has been built on the opportunity to go and have a flutter. There are many people that will go and have a flutter on the races – we have got Caulfield racetrack in my area. You have got people that will play the pokies and go to the casino. But it is very different from those people that will only lose what they set out with in their pockets – and I do stress the word ‘lose’, because I have not met too many winners other than those that enjoy a punt.

What we are really concerned about with this bill are the problem gamblers and the consequences of that. Again, we are talking a lot in this chamber, and rightfully so, about family violence. We know when people have lost their money and we know when people have a gambling problem that that leads to so many other things as well – drugs, alcohol, family violence. They are all issues that need to be addressed and focused on. The great, great benefit of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation is that is what it did. The statistics over 2022–23 say that we had 36,123 problem gamblers in Victoria. This means that almost one in five, or 555,000 Victorians, who gamble may experience harm from gambling – one in five. We also know that there were 122,500 Victorians likely to have experienced harm as a result of someone else’s gambling in the preceding 12 months. That is not just the individual; there were another 122,000 people that would be directly affected by those problem gamblers.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation has provided important work, including 49,626 hours of therapeutic counselling, 20,000 hours of financial counselling for problem gamblers, 10,500 calls to the Gambler's Help line and 63,810 visits to online gambling addiction support services. These are direct services as a result of having a foundation. In addition to that, there is the important research, not led by bureaucrats but led by experts. That research is a core design feature of the foundation, taking it away from the department. By June 2023 their research reports had received more than a thousand citations, with additional publications such as journal articles arising from the foundation's funded research cited more than 2500 times. This foundation has been cited here in Victoria, nationally and internationally for the work that they have done.

What is the government doing in this particular bill? In place of the foundation, it will look at where the money goes in direct services. It takes it away from a centralised body. It takes us away from having accountability and responsibility for that body. Despite the second-reading speech repeatedly using the word 'integrated', it is hard to see how a three-way split will have a concerted effort on focusing on the actual harm. That is what the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation was set up for: a centralised focus on harm itself. There is no clear justification for why the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation has been cut. There are no other words to describe it. There is no reason. They have had 13 years; they have had lots of work. The fact that they have had to rush this bill in simply shows that they have not done their homework on this. They have simply just run out of money, and as a way of running out of money they have said, 'We'll just literally wash the money through three other agencies.' And you might claim that the overall money might be the same, but once you wash it through other agencies, how much is actually going to go to dealing with the problem directly? Where is the accountability? You have got a board, you have got a foundation, you have an annual report, you have the ability for them to be held accountable, you have a CEO and you have a board that actually in the past, up until now, had members of Parliament. The government may laugh and joke around and say it is crap, but the members that were on that board included Labor members. There were many Labor members on the board, who they are calling crap. Well, it is just ridiculous for you to think that your own member responsible is crap.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, with respect to the member for Caulfield, he has used language that I would see as unparliamentary twice now, and he has basically made a generalisation about people on this side of the chamber that just does not exist.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): There is no point of order.

David SOUTHWICK: Even the Speaker of this fine house was a member of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. We have had great members of Parliament that have been on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation from all sides of Parliament – except for the Greens. I think that speaks for itself. I say that it is a real shame that something that has worked – that has made a real difference to gambling addiction – has been scrapped by the Labor Party today. It is a real shame and a real step backwards for problem gamblers here in Victoria.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (11:18): I am pleased to have the opportunity this morning to contribute to the debate on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. Before I go to the substance of the bill before the house this morning, I do want to acknowledge the outstanding contribution made by the member for Eureka, who gave what was indeed a passionate and considered contribution, as she does across all of her contributions. For this matter in particular she has lived experience of that harm, which she has spoken about on numerous occasions within this chamber, and I commend that contribution and acknowledge just how important her lived experience is when it comes to these matters and indeed a whole range of matters that are before the house.

The other point I want to make before I go more specifically to the legislation is this notion or term of 'problem gambler', used so frequently by the previous speaker. I would just caution those members opposite to perhaps have a rethink about the nature of that term and to think about those people that

are experiencing harm due to gambling – reframing the nature of what effectively a system can do to individuals, to families and indeed to communities. That is something that I think is at the forefront of some of the important changes that need to be made, and are being made, which indeed feed into, I think, the wider aims both of the government and of course of the legislation.

We on this side of the house are committed to a better, fairer and stronger state. We want Victorians to be able to move around local communities, to be able to spend time with family and friends and to do the things that they enjoy with a high level of health, education, transport and opportunities to socialise and enjoy those experiences as they go about their lives. But we know that gaming and gambling are an area where that critical balance needs to be struck and where we need to do everything we can to support putting in place those safeguards for those that are experiencing harm due to gambling. The government remains committed to being determined, focused and driven to support those that are experiencing gambling harm.

What is unfortunate is that we see those opposite lacking significant credibility on these issues. We know that last year in this chamber they advocated for exemptions to strong new closing time rules for poker machine venues. These amendments would have applied to a combined 731 poker machines, to almost \$100 million of losses per year. This bill is about improving services for vulnerable Victorians, and it is about making sure, as I started with earlier, we are doing everything we can to reduce harm to those that, very sadly, experience many of the harms that have been canvassed by other members in their contributions and many of the areas that are problematic and more than problematic right across local communities.

It is important to go back and read the Auditor-General's *Reducing the Harm Caused by Gambling* report on the responsible gambling foundation. I know that has been mentioned throughout this morning. In particular the Auditor-General concluded, contained in the report:

The Foundation does not know whether its prevention and treatment programs are effectively reducing the severity of gambling harm.

While the Foundation may help some people through its programs, it does not understand their broader impact. This is because the Foundation lacks an outcome-based framework to develop programs and measure their results.

We know that the report contained those eight recommendations directed largely at the foundation. We know by looking closely at what is in the report that those reforms, those measures and many of the changes that are contained within the legislation before the house are going to many of the issues that have been canvassed.

Many of those issues within local communities are a significant challenge and an immense concern, and they should be a concern not just to all members of this place but to everyone right across the state. What we know is that in part due to much of the research, much of the work with industry, there are serious and significant reforms that have been put in place. We know and understand, as I said earlier, that it is about striking a critical balance. It is about making sure that those who want to go and experience much of what is on offer within local communities can do so in a safe and meaningful way, knowing that the harm that exists within these practices is always there, and how we as a collective, how we as a government, can continue to work right across the state within local communities to make sure that we are supporting those who need it the most. I go back to what was said really poignantly, really passionately, by the member for Eureka, and those matters which she alluded to in her contribution are of serious concern to all of us. We know, thanks to the work of many, that this is something that has needed to be addressed for a very, very long time.

But what we cannot have and what we should never settle for is a situation where business as usual is fine. We are not a team that is focused on business as usual. We want to make sure that we are doing everything we can in every single way to support those that need it the most when in many instances they are often at the lowest point in their life. It is the responsibility of the government and it is the

responsibility of all members of Parliament to ensure that we are doing that, and much of the work that is in the report is about making sure that we are supporting those that need it the most.

There have been significant reforms, particularly over the last couple of years, within this space. There has been a mountain of work to ensure that we are delivering those reforms that we committed to and those reforms that make sure we are taking an important approach to these matters. We know that the bill enhances the public health approach to gambling harm, and we know of the benefits to all Victorians who are experiencing or at risk of gambling harm, including family, friends and loved ones, and that is really important. The purpose of course of the legislation is to improve on the model of the foundation, creating those better connections that others have spoken about between the Gambler's Help services, gambling harm research and prevention activities for the common comorbidities, as others have mentioned, experienced by people that have experienced that harm.

We remain committed to ensuring that we are doing everything we can to support those that are experiencing that harm, but what we will not do is play politics with these matters. What we will not do is be drawn into a political argument that is more about the politics and less about the person. It is about making sure that we are supporting those who, as I mentioned before, are indeed often in a really dire way, experiencing some of the lowest points in their life. It is the responsibly not just of the government but of all members of Parliament in both houses and of course all of our agencies, who I think work really hard each and every day, to support those experiencing this harm. For those reasons and many others which I will not get to, I commend the bill to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (11:28): This is a profoundly disappointing bill because I genuinely believe it is going to have negative effects on tackling gambling-related harm in this state. Can I acknowledge the contributions particularly of the Shadow Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation the member for Gippsland South, the member for Ovens Valley and the member for Caulfield. I also acknowledge the contribution of the member for Eureka and her personal and lived experience of gambling-related harm.

I do think that this Parliament works better when it works on a bipartisan basis, and that is what is so profoundly disappointing about this bill. It is going to take away, it is going to destroy an opportunity for bipartisanship when it comes to tackling gambling-related harm. As the member for Gippsland South noted, when this policy was conceived by me in opposition before the 2014 election the idea was to replicate the success of VicHealth to take a bipartisan approach to promoting healthier outcomes and to take that and apply it in the gambling space. What the government is doing with this bill is removing any vestige of bipartisanship when it comes to tackling these matters. There will be no opportunity for the opposition or other parties to have a seat at the table. I would love somebody from the government to explain to me how that helps the community, how that helps deliver better outcomes, because this is a reversion to the failed systems of the past.

My interest in tackling gambling harm goes back a long way, back to when I was working as a legal adviser to Peter Costello in 1999. We commissioned the Productivity Commission to do a report on Australia's gambling industries, and that was the first really significant deep dive into Australia's gambling industries and to the harm that is created from gambling. I can tell you, at the time that was an inquiry which was resisted by a lot of state governments who saw gambling as being a cash cow for them, and they were not as concerned as they should have been about the harm that flows from the abuse of gambling as a product.

When I was subsequently elected to this place and given the opportunity by Ted Baillieu to serve as Shadow Minister for Gaming, I was very committed to thinking about how we can do better – how we can improve structures and systems to really tackle gambling-related harm better. I remember being in this place during a debate – Tony Robinson was the Minister for Gaming at the time and I was his shadow. He was up there on his feet and he was comparing Sydney's Star casino to Melbourne's Crown, and he talked about how gambling at Crown was – I will never forget the phrase – 'a rolled-gold, dark chocolate experience' compared to the boiled lollies of gambling at Star in Sydney.

What an outrageous thing for any minister to do. You are a minister of the Crown; you are not the Minister for Crown. I said in the chamber at the time that when he made comments like that he sounded like the love child of James Packer and Freddo frog. It was an outrageous thing to do, but it showed you the mindset of the Labor government at the time, and we wanted to do it differently. We wanted to do better.

That is why when I became minister the first thing I did was open the tent to say we did not pretend we knew everything; we wanted to bring in other people, other parties, other voices. I also did not think that the Minister for Gaming should be personally signing off on every piece of research that gets conducted, because governments are seen to have a conflict of interest. Now, you can argue whether they do or do not, but certainly the perception is that governments have got a conflict of interest when it comes to gambling policy, because they do make money out of gambling. So there can be a perception in the community that governments do not do as much as they could or try as hard as they should to eliminate or reduce gambling-related harm because that might affect their bottom line.

One of the ways we can deal with that is by taking the politics out and taking the ministerial approvals out and giving them to an independent board, and that is why the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation was created. And now the government wants to kill it off. It is a retrograde step. It is going to hurt those people in our community who suffer from gambling-related harm, and not just the problem gamblers themselves but their families and others. When we set up the VRGF it came with a 41 per cent increase in budget, so it was not just 'Let's change the structures,' it was a big increase in funding to tackle gambling-related harm – \$150 million over four years, a 41 per cent increase over what the previous Labor government had spent. It showed we were serious about it. We were serious about it. And the problem was we had all the attempts to tackle gambling-related harm – it was atomised; they were all in silos. There was no single agency that had responsibility and accountability for funding the research, for funding the advertisements, for the public awareness campaigns, for funding the Gambler's Help services and for funding for venue support workers to go out into venues to try and make sure that staff who were supposedly trained in the responsible service of gambling actually delivered on that to provide assistance to people who needed assistance.

That is why the VRGF was created, and the government is now abolishing it. For what reason – to go back to a failed model of the past? Please explain to me that there is something more to it than just wanting to erase a little bit of a former government's legacy, because I cannot see the sense in doing what the government is wanting to do. If the government thinks that we should change the name to maybe the Victorian Gambling Harm Minimisation Foundation, that is fine; we can do that. If the government thinks that the organisation can be improved – and yes, sure, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office make criticisms of some aspects of the VRGF. Guess what, VAGO makes criticisms of every single organisation it audits – every single one. When VAGO makes criticisms of the health department we do not turn around and abolish the health department. When VAGO makes criticisms of Victoria Police we do not abolish the police. We fix it. This is a serious issue. I cannot take the government at face value, because what they say does not tally with what they are doing. I do not see how this is going to help tackle gambling-related harm in any way.

I was bemused to receive a letter signed by the Honourable Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, dated 16 May, thanking me:

... for the important contribution you have made to the enhanced wellbeing of our community in your role as a director at the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation ...

She said:

Since the Foundation was established in 2012, the Board's leadership has underpinned significant developments in how gambling harm is perceived and addressed, most notably through a public health approach. Its insights and advice informed the recommendations of public inquiries, including the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence.

The Foundation's research program has been instrumental in advancing understanding of the complex nature of gambling harm, how it manifests, who is affected and why some groups are more at risk than others.

That sounds like a pretty good recommendation for the work of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, so why on earth is the government seeking to get rid of it? 'No, let's go back to a failed system where everything's in a silo.' We have now got the situation where the gaming regulator is going to be asked to undertake some of the work of the foundation. And then what did Annette Kimmitt, the CEO of the regulator, say in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on 23 May:

So we are going to be working together with Health, with the department and the research arm of the department to develop – as soon as VRGF join us – a five-year strategy ...

So you are saying that we are going to silo these things, atomise them – 'Oh, but we're all going to work together.' We actually have an organisation that works together now – it is called the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. That is why I do not support this bill. The member for Sunbury talked about playing politics; I think there is only one side of the house that is playing politics on this, and it is the government. They are abolishing something that does good work and that means a lot to people in the community, and we are going to see worse outcomes for Victorians as a consequence.

Can I pay tribute to the current directors of the board: Tass Mousaferiadis, the chair; Alison Roberts; Jim Pasinis; Lee Crockford; Tina Hosseini; and Zana Bytheway; and parliamentary representatives the member for Kororoit and the member for Shepparton. I also acknowledge the work of the member for Ovens Valley, who was on it for 10 years.

This is an important organisation. It was designed to do better than we have done in the past to tackle gambling-related harm. It was designed to do it in a transparent way and in a consolidated and integrated way. It was designed to do it with a level of bipartisanship. And now the government wants to walk away from all of that. For what reason – none that can be adequately explained. There has been nothing in the second-reading speech and nothing, with great respect, from the members so far and the contributions so far. This is a backwards step for gambling in this state. It is a backwards step for vulnerable people in this state. The bill is the wrong solution to the wrong question, and it should be opposed.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (11:38): I stand before you to speak on this bill. I heard the words that the member for Malvern had to say, and I respect not only his contribution to the initiation of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation but also his continued work and advocacy on the board. I understand that for you this potentially is a sad day. However, this government believes firmly that this is a step in the right direction. I personally have spoken to the minister about the reasons why this step is being taken, and I firmly believe that it is the step that is best for harm minimisation here in Victoria, so I stand before you to commend this bill.

I want to thank my colleagues for their contributions previously. Everyone who has spoken in this place has spoken with the right dignity and respect, and the empathy that has come across from everyone has well and truly been noted, so thank you to everyone for their contributions.

I have been proud to sit on the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation since August last year. It was a bit of a late start, but at the same time I have seen the good work that has happened at the VRGF, and I have proudly sat in the board meetings and listened to everyone's thoughts and the varied debates that have occurred during that time. The foundation is a statutory authority which was created by the Victorian Parliament back in 2012, and it was specifically to address the challenges of gambling harm in the Victorian community. Over its 12 years the VRGF through its research agenda has established a body of knowledge and understanding of gambling harm and how it affects individuals, families and of course our communities. This growing evidence base has been supported by all aspects of the foundation's work, including prevention programs, treatment and support services, public awareness campaigns and policy advice to the government. It has also been the basis upon which the VRGF has adopted a public health approach to gambling harm.

Over the foundation's journey much has been achieved for Victorians experiencing or at risk of harm from gambling through its engagement and collaboration with the voices of lived experience; internationally renowned research program and evaluation and knowledge services; early intervention, prevention, treatment and support services through the Gambler's Help program; public health, awareness-raising and help-seeking campaigns; advocacy in the public domain and provision of advice to government; the Love the Game and Be Ahead of the Game education programs; professional development work with the sector; the creation of an effective gambling harm prevention outcomes framework; and of course submissions to the 2021 Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence.

The foundation's functions and related activities are proposed to be delivered under a new operation model as of 1 July 2024. That work will continue to build the gambling harm knowledge base and continue to contribute to strategies that minimise gambling-related harm at an individual, a community and a population level. It has objectives of reducing the prevalence and severity of problem gambling and fostering responsible gambling.

This legislation before us today is a product of the foundation's work together with the state government, which I am very proud and humbled to have been part of. I particularly want to single out and thank the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, my colleague the honourable member for Williamstown, who has been incredibly consultative with our chair and board on this legislation the entire way through. Her work on this has mostly gone unseen, but it has gone a long way to making the legislation as strong as it is.

As I have said before in this place, I absolutely loathe pokie machines and organised gambling because I have seen firsthand the destruction that they cause. In my teenage years I worked for a little while for a hot chicken and chips shop in Williamstown called Hot Wings. It was right next to the Williamstown high-rise public housing estate, which was next to what was formerly the Williamstown RSL. Every single day that I worked there elderly people from the housing estate would come in for a meal. These were people who were completely dependent on the age pension. They would come into the shop for a meal as soon as they had cashed their pension allowance. The first time you saw them after they had cashed their pension allowance they would order a full meal – chicken, chips, vegetables, you name it. The next time they came in they would simply order the \$2 chips. Why? It was because it was all that they had left over. In the meantime they had gone down to the RSL, they had had their pension in their pocket and they had lost all of their money to the pokies. Every single time that would happen, and it always broke my heart.

Each year more than half a million Victorians experience gambling harm, whether it be related to their own or someone else's gambling, and it costs Victoria an estimated \$7 billion every year. As I have also noted before, the Brimbank local government area in my seat of Kororoit suffers the highest losses from gambling of any local government area in Victoria. We are literally ranked number one in the state. It is not a stat that any LGA is proud of or wants; it is a scourge on our community. Frankly, I personally do not think that pokies and electronic gambling should exist or need to exist in our community or in this state at all, and I do not think that it is really such a far-flung idea as others might.

Gambling harm can present as feelings of regret, shame, guilt, depression and anxiety, increased use of alcohol and other drugs and/or family violence. It leads to family and relationship breakdowns, loss of employment, homelessness and suicide, and its devastation is immeasurable. Because of these significant comorbidities, gambling harm can fall through the cracks in primary care settings when a person seeks treatment for other co-occurring issues. The siloed delivery of services and the stigmatised nature of gambling harm have meant that the integration of other supports has not occurred. This is a serious problem as there is a high degree of correlation between gambling and other issues. A 2017 study commissioned by the VRGF found that over 30 per cent of people presenting to mental health community support services were experiencing problems with gambling and around 75 per cent of people presenting to a gambling service had a mental health issue. The lack of integration and warm referral pathways causes issues with treatment and retention. As service providers have

noted, for a lot of people gambling harm occurs as a coping mechanism to deal with other issues, including mental health conditions. This is exacerbated by the fact that this is a stigmatised area of health. It is these terrible silos and gaps in support that this legislation is seeking to bring to an end.

The purpose of this bill is to improve the model of the responsible gambling foundation by creating better connections between gamblers, help services, gambling harm research and prevention activities, with the common comorbidities experienced by people with lived or living experiences of gambling harm. The government's new model of prevention and response will mean that gambling harm reduction, prevention and therapeutic services will sit together in health to support a broad public health approach. It would also mean that publicly funded research is connected to and informs improvements to these vital health services. This is necessary, because having the sole public funder of gambling treatment services siloed in one entity that only deals with gambling harm has meant that the integration of its prevention and treatment programs with other services has been insufficient. The foundation's research agenda has not been used to drive changes and improvements to the delivery of its treatment and prevention functions. In its 12 years of operation, the functions of the foundation have been relatively unchanged.

Broadly, the functions it delivers fall into three categories: first of all, the prevention and programs; secondly, gambling harm awareness; and third, research, evaluation and knowledge mobilisation. All of these functions will be retained in the new model of prevention and response. The prevention and programs function, including gamblers health, will be transferred to the Department of Health to enable better services integration with community health and of course clinical mental health expertise. These services will continue to be delivered across metropolitan and regional Victoria by community health organisations and will include the delivery of specialist therapeutic gambling and financial counselling through a network of local Gambler's Help services, the delivery of community-based gambling harm prevention and community education activities and the delivery of training and support to gaming venues, including mandated responsible service of gambling training by venue support workers, which will also be based at the local Gambler's Help services.

Sitting on the board of the VRGF has allowed me to experience firsthand the empathy many have got and the passion that many have for gambling harm minimisation. I thank each and every one on the board that has been part of it. I would warmly like to thank my colleagues on the VRGF – and of course our chair Tass Mousaferiadis – for their work on this and the passion and goodwill that they have brought to the table along with everyone else. I have really been pleased to see how much work can be done by people when they are driven by goodwill.

This is far from the last word I will have to say in this place in this term on gambling harm, and there is still much, much more work to be done for people in our communities. Meanwhile, I commend the legislation.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (11:48): Today I rise to make a contribution on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. In May last year I was appointed to be a director on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, joining the member for Malvern, and I take this opportunity to thank the member for Malvern for leading the way in this space and for his dedication and contribution over many years to the board.

Along with my fellow board members I am truly astounded and appalled by this decision by the ministers to abolish this foundation. This has been a massive shock to the foundation and still is to this day. The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation has been a highly functional body that has proven its value and the difference it has made addressing responsible gambling and gambling harm. To think at a time when people's lives are severely impacted by gambling, during a cost-of-living crisis, this government is shutting down its key body who are providing a successful service to those most vulnerable.

We know that gambling addiction is linked to increased family violence as well as mental health issues and suicide. The Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation has not provided justification for this decision, and, as the lead speaker the member for Gippsland South raised, there has been no review and analysis or any clear reasoning for this decision. As the minister stated in her second-reading speech on the bill:

Each year, more than half-a-million Victorians experience gambling harm – whether it be related to their own or someone else’s gambling.

Half a million lives are impacted, yet we make a significant change with no review.

I did receive a letter of thanks, and the member for Malvern also mentioned the letter he received from the minister in regard to how outstandingly the board had performed and how the foundation had provided successful outcomes. I have also been so impressed by the hard work of the board and the incredible work that has been done not just during my time on the board but for the many years prior. I wanted to join this board, as my region has very high gambling harm statistics. In the new proposed model, how will the voices of the regions be heard?

I have also seen firsthand the devastation gambling addiction can have. A close friend has a gambling addiction, and none of us were aware until it was too late. He lost the family’s life savings, including the money from the sale of their family home. It was just the most devastating time not only for his family but also for us as close friends. The devastating part to this is there were no signs and he just kept running the bank account down until there was nothing left – over \$200,000 gone. The impact on the family is life changing. They will never be able to afford to own a home again. We need to keep working hard to avoid these types of scenarios, and as we know, there are many stories like this.

I would like to pay tribute to the foundation’s board chair Tass Mousaferiadis and deputy chair Dr Alison Roberts as well as fellow directors and staff of the foundation. I must say that I have sat on many boards; this would have to be one of the most professional, productive and hardworking boards that I have been involved in. As I have mentioned, the minister has not given the board a relevant reason for this decision. When I look back on my time and what I have witnessed and the work prior, it has been an incredibly successful foundation. The foundation has played an important role in responsible gambling as well as supporting people affected by gambling harm by focusing on prevention, early intervention and support for those who are particularly vulnerable to gambling harm, as well as those living in regional and rural communities such as my electorate of Shepparton district.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation was first established by the former coalition government in 2012 under the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 specifically to address gambling harm in the Victorian community by the then Minister for Gaming the member for Malvern. The foundation’s purpose has been to prevent and reduce gambling harm for all Victorians. Since its establishment by the former coalition government, the foundation has funded research and other activities that add to the knowledge and understanding of gambling harm, worked in partnership with others to offer evidence-based prevention programs and support services to those affected by gambling harm and delivered communication campaigns that inform and influence gambling-related attitudes and behaviours.

Axing the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation will only place additional hurdles in the way of people with a gambling problem seeking assistance, help and support. Putting an important organisation like the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation on the chopping board has put further out of reach support for Victorians with a gambling problem. Problem gambling statistics continue to rise, and we know the incredible impact on those affected and their loved ones. This is not a program the Allan government should be cutting at a time when more households and individuals are under financial pressure and the risks of gambling harm are heightened. Despite being sold as a reform, this is clearly a cost-saving exercise, because the Allan Labor government cannot manage money and Victorians are paying the price. Instead, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation will be moved to the Department of Health, to integrate, so the government claims, with community

health services, and gambling harm awareness functions will be transitioned to the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. They are literally pulling apart these services, which will cause a disconnect and completely abolish the hard work that has been achieved so far.

There have been so many successful programs rolled out that have truly made a difference. In 2014 the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation launched the Love the Game sporting club program in response to community concern about the convergence of sport and gambling. To date the program helps reduce young people's exposure to sports betting advertising and raises awareness of the risks of gambling harm for young people growing up in this particularly normalised environment. Some 659 sporting clubs across the state have signed up as part of the program, such as the Grahamvale Sports Club and Tallygaroopna Football Netball Club, which are in my electorate. In addition, more than 90 Victorian schools are involved through the school education program. Be Ahead of the Game is a school education program that is designed to help young people understand the risks associated with gambling and gambling harm. The program offers free 1-hour information sessions for students, parents and teachers; free curriculum-aligned teaching resources for upper primary to senior secondary students; as well as information and resources for parents and carers to support young people. Gambler's Help is an important initiative that provides services via a range of community organisations across the state, particularly in rural and regional Victoria. Gambler's Help provides services like online, telephone and face-to-face counselling and advice and information.

Across the Shepparton district electorate gambling has a significant impact on individuals that gamble. As such, data provided by the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission for 2022–23 shows \$117,000 alone was spent on pokies per day, equating to close to \$43 million per year across eight venues with a combined total of 329 poker machines. From this data provided by the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, Greater Shepparton is ranked 28th in the state for high pokies expenditure. In addition, Greater Shepparton is ranked ninth in Victoria for socio-economic disadvantage. We should be supporting the foundation to continue their great work when the need for support for those experiencing gambling harm is so high, not retracting years of hard work and proven data when the foundation is making such a difference.

In closing, I just need to also raise a couple of incidents. I have a very close friend who has an 18-year-old son, and at this very time she is trying to support him in regard to his gambling addiction. We know the young people within our community often get on their phones and gamble. This young gentleman was at university, and he has now had to remove himself from his education due to his gambling addiction. We know there are many incidents, but it is the young people across my communities that really deeply worry me. They are the people of our future, and we have to keep trying to do more. I oppose this bill before the house.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (11:55): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in favour of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. From the outset I would like to thank the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and her team for putting an immense effort into this piece of legislation. Their work to do all they can to ensure that the government's gambling harm prevention and response is up to date and effective should be commended. I would like to acknowledge the member for Eureka and her ongoing contributions to this house with regard to gambling and the effects that it has had on her life. Her contributions are always very raw and emotional and give us a good sense of the consequences of gambling here in this state.

The importance of continual reform in this space cannot be overstated. Victorians lost an estimated \$3 billion in the last financial year. Let me repeat that: \$3 billion. Residents in the Glen Waverley district, unfortunately, were no outlier to this horrific statistic. Across the City of Monash \$122.5 million was lost last year, and \$56 million was lost in the City of Whitehorse. Just last month, in April, more than \$9 million and \$5 million was lost respectively in Monash and Whitehorse. There can be no clearer picture painted of the serious harm that these electronic gaming machines cause to my constituents and Victorians as a whole.

It is extremely alarming that each year more than half a million Victorians experience gambling harm, either through their own gambling or because of others' actions. This costs Victoria some \$7 billion every year. We know that gambling harm does not just stop at financial distress, as profound as that is. It brings a profound sense of guilt and shame, often leading to mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression. And with these serious struggles we tragically lose too many of our fellow Victorians to suicide. Symptoms can also present as mood swings and general irritability as well as lashing out at others. Many lose relationships with their friends and loved ones, which further perpetuates the downward spiral filled with negativity and sorrow. Further, there is quantifiable evidence to link gambling harm to both substance and alcohol abuse as well as increased family and domestic violence. What this clearly highlights is that gambling harm is a multifaceted problem, not just in the pure numerical and financial sense but much more so in a holistic sense. Such a complex and complicated issue requires sophisticated and tailored responses to target both preventative and response measures. That is why this government is introducing this bill – to tackle these issues with efficacy and conviction.

This bill seeks to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to establish the Gambling Harm Response Fund and abolish the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council and the Liquor Control Advisory Council. It will also amend the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission Act 2011 to transfer certain functions from the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission as well as amend the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 to abolish the Liquor Control Advisory Council.

In essence, these changes establish and implement the framework of the government's new gambling harm prevention and response model. To put it simply, the government has decided that programs which serve a preventative purpose are now better suited to the Department of Health to facilitate fluid integration and multiple services. Gambling harm prevention campaigning will now be the responsibility of the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, fitting in with the commission's key goals of harm minimisation, and research and evaluation will be transferred to the Department of Justice and Community Safety, giving this multifaceted issue a cross-portfolio overview and response.

These major reforms have come about through a process of extensive stakeholder engagement and communication. Not only were the government agencies and departments consulted, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation's staff and board were also engaged. Further consultation occurred with Gambler's Help and harm prevention providers as well as the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Alliance for Gambling Reform and the Victorian InterChurch Gambling Taskforce. Through this process it was made clear that a publicly accessible and accountable model of addressing gambler harm will continue. This, in conjunction with the opportunity for better cooperation and coordination of integrated services, would provide an environment in which these functions could complement each other.

Another significant point raised was the current governance structure. It is outdated and in need of updating. In reflecting upon the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011, this bill removes the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council and the Liquor Control Advisory Council. These are historical forms of stakeholder and community engagement which are no longer fit for purpose. The methods in which such engagement occurs can now be hindered by older structures, and this bill seeks to create more opportunities for greater consultation. This includes reaching out to those with lived experience – either directly or indirectly – of gambling harm, making for an up-to-date system. Being provided with a diversity of views and perspectives will better inform how policies are made and implemented.

As forementioned, gambling harm is an issue which extends beyond financial means, which is extremely dangerous in itself. This is a public health problem which needs to be addressed in a way which encapsulates all the other issues that follow it. We must recognise the stigma which follows from both gambling and mental health issues and how that can act as a deterrent to individuals reaching for support. Around 75 per cent of people who present to a gambling help service also have a mental

health issue. A study showed that over 30 per cent of people who seek mental health support have a gambling issue. The interconnectedness of these symptoms means that if we do not have a coordinated approach, people can fall through the cracks. This bill seeks to address this specifically, formulating a pathway for a more integrated and inclusive approach and providing a warmer and more welcoming environment for people to speak up.

On top of the prevention and protection programs, gambling harm awareness and research will continue to be funded. We want to see services delivered with a basis of understanding which stems from publicly funded research. With more knowledge and data, any possible improvements in policy can be evaluated and actioned. The reform also provides community-based gambling harm prevention activities, including at schools. We know the younger children, especially teenagers, are more likely to be negatively influenced in their formative years. I remember recently just walking down the streets of Kingsway in Glen Waverley and seeing a group of probably 15- or 16-year-olds – four of them – all discussing what they were currently going to bet on with regard to a multi on their phones. So we need to make sure that we protect our future generations from the scourge of gambling harm. Another popular form of gambling aside from the pokies is sports betting, which is why we are having a positive engagement with young people at sporting clubs to communicate harm prevention measures, seeking to mitigate longer term risks. And finally, this bill, through the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, will deliver training and support to venues which have electronic gaming machines.

The foundation has done tremendous work in helping those who suffer from the consequences of gambling harm, and I congratulate all of those who do such incredible work in this space. It is great to hear that all existing staff will continue to have a job in this critical sector helping people in some of their most vulnerable moments. We all recognise the significant emotional toll this would have on staff, which is why funding is provided for suicide prevention and mental health supports for them too. This government has a strong record to stand on in investing \$165 million into supporting Victorians who are experiencing or who are at risk of experiencing gambling harm, but we know that there is always more work to do.

This bill will make improvements to the functions of the foundation so that there can be greater coordination for a more integrated approach. It will facilitate the creation of pathways for other public health responses to be intertwined, including mental health, alcohol and substance abuse, financial counselling and family violence services. It recognises that there is always potential for better public campaigns to raise awareness to prevent potential harm and better support for those who work in the industry. I am proud to support these measures which seek to promote positive and honest conversations about gambling harm from an early age in schools to sporting clubs and sporting venues. In the case that people do experience the financial, emotional, mental or societal harms from gambling, this bill forms an empathetic yet strong network of support for victims.

I again commend the work being undertaken in this process, from vast and extensive consultation to listening to the recommendations of the Victorian Auditor-General's *Reducing the Harm Caused by Gambling* report. I am proud to be part of an Allan Labor government which takes tackling the stigma around gambling harm seriously to provide a warm and caring environment for people to open up and find the help that they need. I believe this bill takes the appropriate measures in modernising our response to gambling harm, from an understanding that this is a broad issue which has diverse intersections. It correctly addresses wider public health issues. It places a necessary focus on the prevention of and response to gambling harm as well as the policy research and evaluation functions which are all in conjunction required to deal with this significant issue. I am proud to commend this bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (12:05): It does not give me any pleasure to rise to speak on the repeal of the Victorian Responsible Gaming Foundation. I was just having a conversation with the member for Shepparton, who was in fact on the board from early last year and cannot speak highly enough about the work that the foundation does and has done, the data that it analyses, the lived experience it takes into account and particularly the work that the VRGF does in regional and rural Victoria. Before

I really get into it, I would like to acknowledge the member for Eureka for sharing her stories. As I well know, sharing lived experience and personal stories in this place can be rough, but I think it is vitally important and gives a very human element to how we approach these sorts of things.

The purpose of the bill, as we have heard from many of the speakers throughout the day, as the title suggests, is to implement the government's repeal of the VRGF and to allocate its current responsibilities between the Department of Health, the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. It axes both the Responsible Gaming Ministerial Advisory Council and the Liquor Control Advisory Council without legislating a replacement model. It is perplexing enough that you would make a move like this without legislating a replacement model to take over the work that both of those councils are doing. It also replaces the Responsible Gambling Fund with the Gambling Harm Response Fund.

I think everyone will agree that gambling reform is needed and more work is needed in this space. As the member for Shepparton was talking about, with another important personal story, when you have children – I am sorry, at 18 you are still a child. I was still very much a child. I am sure you were still very much a child, Acting Speaker, at the age of 18. But to have an addiction to gambling with largely because of electronic gambling, whether that is mobile phones or iPads, just the accessibility of it – the only checks and balances are a pop-up box that says 'Are you 18?' – anyone, if they can read the word 'yes', can get around that. To hear stories like that is really quite heartbreaking, and more needs to be done in this space.

But I am just perplexed as to why this would be the move forward. The work that the VRGF do is, from someone that sits on the board, amazing. They are doing such great work. They are a respectful board. They are doing fantastic work. But then to send all of what they are doing in three different directions to essentially do the same thing not only sounds like double handling to me but sounds like triple handling. I will quote from a letter to the member for Shepparton. A couple of paragraphs in, the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation says:

The Foundation's research program has been instrumental in advancing understanding of the complex nature of gambling harm, how it manifests, who is affected and why some groups are more at risk than others. Of particular importance has been the work on the significant comorbidities of gambling harm, including mental ill-health, drug and alcohol use and family violence.

One begets the other more often than not, I suppose, is what I am trying to say.

I know it was raised in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week why we would take a single foundation that is doing amazing work and spread it in three different directions. The member for Gippsland South said to the minister at the time, or it may have been a member of the department, that it just feels like it is the vibe of the thing. He asked if it was political, because this was something that was set up by the Liberals and the Nationals. We have got someone sitting here who sat on the foundation and who speaks so highly about the work that is being done, the data that has been collected and the research that is being done. Again, I just fail to see why you would repeal a foundation from doing that work. That is my main issue with this bill. I cannot understand the repeal, and I wish someone would publicly justify it, because I cannot see why on earth we would be doing this.

When we go back to talking about gambling reform, again I think there are other measures we could take. I do a lot of work in my cross-border community, and moving forward with gambling reform needs consideration. We know the border is an issue. Having one set of rules on one side of the river compared to the other is a real problem because it does nothing for gambling harm in Victoria on the border. You literally go 5 minutes from Victoria across the road to the clubs in New South Wales, where the rules are completely different, and we will see this come out down the line with the other reforms that have been flagged. There needs to be much more consideration to this. I had the Shadow Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation up with me in Mildura and Robinvale a couple of months ago so I could show him, because I know it is difficult to understand how close these clubs are from one side of the border to the other. So I brought him up to have a look and see that it is literally

5 minutes from the Euston Club Resort to the Robinvale Golf Club, for example, where there are large gaming rooms. It is the same thing in Mildura, with all of the different venues there, and the Coomealla club, for example. One set of rules – I talk about having separate regulations or reforms for regional, rural and particularly border communities, because doing one thing in Victoria and not having a border bubble or a border precinct on both sides, particularly with gambling reform, is just fraught with danger.

I have been doing a lot of consultation since these gambling reforms were flagged, particularly at the Gateway hotel and the Mildura Working Man's Club. They are concerned as well, and the point they make is actually really valid. It started with just a conversation about these possible reforms with the CEO of the Gateway hotel. He was adamant that instead of overcomplicating things we should enforce licences within venues for gambling machines. If you start enforcing licences and venues then are at serious risk of losing their licences, they will soon pull their heads in. They will soon enforce what they are supposed to be doing. And I am sure for the most part most venues do; most venues are very good at toeing the line and doing what they have to do. But for the few that do not and that ruin it for everyone else, start enforcing the licences. If they breach it, shut them down for 30 days. Thirty days of having your gaming room locked is really significant. If they do it again, it is 60 days, then three strikes and you are out. It might sound oversimplistic, but sometimes I think we have to get back to the fundamentals and simplify this stuff rather than overcomplicating it.

I was listening to the member for Malvern before, and he referred to this letter as well. We are just perplexed, after the work that the foundation has done, about why on earth you would take this from that one pathway and from a board that was very respectful. I know that they are devastated that this is happening, because they put their heart and soul into it. There are people with lived experience that have contributed, and I know that they are devastated. I am having real trouble understanding why this is being repealed and what the outcomes are going to be.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (12:15): I am happy to stand and talk to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. It is a little bit like Baz Luhrmann's Red Curtain Trilogy inasmuch as this is the third time we have debated a gambling bill in this place over the last year. Unlike Baz's Red Curtain Trilogy, I am sure this will not be the last time we talk about gambling.

Back in May 2023 we debated the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, which delivered significant recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence to strengthen the casino taxation acts around Crown Casino. That bill consolidated the administration of a number of Victoria's gambling taxes and also implemented the 2023–24 budget measures. It established a new standalone Gambling Taxation Act which brought Victoria into line with other states to provide a fairer amount of revenue for Victoria. In my view I characterise that bill as a fair go.

In October last year we debated the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, which made amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2023 and the Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993 to deliver gambling harm reforms and improve the implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence. The amendments sought to minimise gambling-related harm through the reduction in load-up limits on gambling machines from \$1000 to \$100; an increase in spin rates to slow the rate of play on new gambling machines, reducing the speed at which people lost money or could launder money; and a statewide mandatory precommitment and carded play. To me the best part of that reform is the legislation that will make sure that all electronic gambling venues outside the casino are closed between 4 am and 10 am. There will be no more staging of closing hours, providing people with an important break in play. I characterise this as a bill of action.

And now we have the third act. This bill repeals the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 and amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2023, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission Act 2011 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. The bill will abolish the Victorian

Responsible Gambling Foundation as well as abolish the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council and the Liquor Control Advisory Council. It will establish the Gambling Harm Response Fund and will provide additional functions to the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. This bill makes sure it is fair for all. This bill makes sure that action is taken, and this bill wraps around our community and sets out how it will achieve those things set out in the previous two bills. The main aim of these bills is to reduce gambling harm or indeed minimise it to such an extent it no longer exists.

I just want to read a quote from a media release today that might help the member for Mildura understand what is going on. It is from the Alliance for Gambling Reform, and they say:

The proposed changes outlined in the VRGF Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024 before the Victorian parliament have been welcomed by The Alliance for Gambling Reform.

The Alliance for Gambling Reform, CEO Carol Bennett said the proposal to disband the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF) being debated in the Victorian parliament this week were a step in the right direction.

“We welcome the fact the budget – \$165m over four years is unchanged, and the functions of the disbanded Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation ... will now reflect more of a ‘whole of government’ approach incorporating them into departments of health and justice as well as expanding the role of the regulator ...

The information and research that the VRGF has done will be kept and used. The alliance is a great organisation of people with deep, lived experience, and I certainly take their excitement and agreement on this bill as a good thing.

Just to be clear – this is something I have wanted to talk about before – those that experience harm from gambling are not problem gamblers. They do not have a gambling problem; they are in fact addicts that are, unfortunately, preyed upon by the gambling industry, who need them to generate profits that many gambling premises and casinos enjoy. The definition of an addict is someone exhibiting a compulsive, chronic physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behaviour or activity – someone unable to stop taking, using or doing something as a habit. There are plenty of good habits out there that do not cause anything like the harm that gambling addicts suffer and endure.

I have said before in this place that I do not gamble. I do not actually understand the appeal of gambling. I am not allured by it. The most I might gamble is to buy a lotto ticket every couple of months, and I generally never win. I acknowledge that there are plenty of people that can gamble safely and responsibly. That said, I have had friends that have developed gambling addictions, and I have seen firsthand what gambling harm has done to them, their jobs, their careers and their families. So I just want to talk about gambling harm for a minute, because we really need to understand and paint a picture of what it looks like and why this bill is so important.

It is inconceivable to me that Australians lose more to electronic gambling machines per capita than any other country in the world. In the last financial year Australians across only five states lost a staggering \$14.5 billion to poker machines in pubs and clubs. For the 2022–23 financial year Victorians lost over \$3 billion on electronic gaming machines and \$2.6 billion on online, trackside and venue wagering services. Just to be clear, this amount does not include losses to poker machines at the casino. These losses cause enormous damage to not just the people losing their money but also their families, their friends, their relationships, their mental health, their work environment and their community. This damage includes family violence, homelessness, family breakdowns, physical and mental health issues and quite often suicide attempts. There is a very strong link between gambling and suicide, and when you talk to former gambling addicts they will, without doubt, tell you of people they have known with gambling addictions, people they have sat next to at the pokies who are no longer here because they have taken their life because of their addiction. It is not just the fact that they lost their house, their marriage, their friends, their job or even their children; it is the insupportable shame of their addiction and what it has driven them to do.

There was a study undertaken by the Federation University in collaboration with the Coroners Court of Victoria of suicides between 2009 and 2016 where the Victorian suicide register was examined. It revealed at least 184 suicides were directly related to gambling harm – and I am sorry, but that does not sound like harm to me, it sounds like devastation. There were an additional 17 gambling-attributed suicides by affected others, such as family members. Researchers concluded that gambling-related suicides were about 4 per cent of total suicides in Victoria, but they also believe that it is actually much, much higher than that and could be up to 20 per cent. I might add that there is not really enough or proper research being done in this area of gambling-related suicides, and much more could be done and needs to be done.

Importantly, something we should all think about and keep at the front of our minds is that there is no research on those addicted gamblers who have attempted suicide, some of them multiple times. It is estimated that every year in Australia 65,000 people attempt suicide. How many of those are from gambling? Well, if you go back to the 4 per cent, suicide attempts would be 2600 people a year, and if it is as high as 20 per cent, then you are talking 13,000 people a year attempting suicide because of gambling. That is what addiction does. Gambling addiction exacts an inordinate toll of misery and is often worse in poorer communities across Victoria and indeed Australia.

In looking at this I also wondered what the actual financial cost to the community was from gambling-related suicides. Working out the real cost of suicide and non-fatal suicide attempts is complex and complicated, but according to a paper published in 2017 on the National Library of Medicine website the approximate cost in 2014 was estimated to be around \$6.5 billion. If 4 per cent of suicides were gambling related, that would equal a quarter of a billion dollars.

An estimated 330,000 Victorians experience harm as a result of gambling each year, costing Victoria around \$7 billion annually. These people are not well served by the current model, and that is why the Victorian government has developed a new gambling harm prevention and response model, which aims to embed a more holistic approach to addressing gambling harm. This bill makes sure people do not fall through the cracks – that they can access the help and care they need, no matter where they live. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (12:25): The bill before us seeks to abolish the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF), and I will address the content of the bill in my remarks. But let us just take a moment to remind ourselves about gambling and more importantly the harm it inflicts across Victoria. Preventing gambling harm has been part of the Greens' platform for decades. What do we know about gambling in Victoria? We know the harm is that gambling strip-mines people and communities across Victoria of their savings, their homes, their other assets, their family relationships, their dignity and their future. We also know from the data where the harm is occurring. The most severely affected communities are those in local government areas at the lowest socio-economic level. We sadly, tragically, know the extent of the harm. In Victoria there were at least 184 gambling-related suicides from 2009 to 2016, and researchers point out that the number of suicides is likely to be higher than that. We know how gambling harm is inflicted.

While all forms of gambling generate harm, by far the largest monster in the pack is poker machines, and these machines are designed to be addictive. They are disproportionately located in already stressed communities where residents experience the highest losses and the highest rates of gambling harm. Since they were introduced into this state by the Kirner Labor government in 1991, regrettably Victorians have lost more than \$66 billion to the machines.

There has been welcome action from the government over the past two years. Much of this has been to reform how the casino operates and is managed, necessitated by the excoriating royal commission into Crown's unscrupulous and illegal behaviour. The government is to be commended for having implemented or set in place to be implemented soon all of the royal commission recommendations. One of those recommendations was to establish a new regulator. The government acted, and the

Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission is open, staffed and operating. Encouragingly, we see that they have been active in conducting investigations and issuing infringements.

We commend the government for taking action last year to reduce and standardise opening hours. From October this year all venues that have gaming machines must be closed from 4 am to 10 am, stopping the shocking situation of venues staggering their opening hours and bussing addicted people between those venues to allow 24-hour access to gambling. The Greens believe that venues should be closed from midnight to 10 am, which is informed by the clear evidence that the majority of gambling harm occurs in the hours before 4 am, but it is welcome and at least a step in the right direction.

I do note that the larger reforms for gambling announced by then Premier Andrews in July 2023 have yet to be brought before the Parliament, aside from the opening hours, and we hope to see this package of reforms soon. We also welcomed the comments by the minister at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings last week that another set of reforms may be on the table to have a mandatory break in play built into reforms. We have asked the minister's office to provide more information on that. These reforms are still a long way away from Western Australia and indeed many other countries, where poker machines are confined to casinos. WA has less gambling harm and still has a thriving pub and club culture.

Let us turn to the details of this bill, which is to abolish the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. That foundation was set up as a statutory authority with a goal to prevent and reduce gambling harm for all Victorians. Since 2011 it has funded research and other activities that add to the knowledge and understanding of gambling harm, and it maintains an excellent dataset that is easily accessible. It has worked in partnership with others to deliver prevention programs and support services to those affected by gambling harm, and it has run communication campaigns that inform and influence gambling-related attitudes and behaviours. There are two main questions that I have. First, these are all vital public functions, and all should be continued in Victoria. If the VRGF is to be abolished, where will these vital services be provided, and how well are those agencies placed to deliver them? Second, what is the broader policy, legislative and operational context in which those functions will be delivered, and how does that inform this debate?

Let us turn to the first of those questions. If the government wishes to abolish the VRGF, what does the government propose in its place? The minister's office has communicated that those functions will be distributed across three agencies: The Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission will be responsible for gambling harm awareness and prevention programs; the Department of Health will run prevention functions, including Gambler's Help; and the Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria will set up and develop expertise in public health research, policy and evaluation functions.

For a transition that includes the abolition of a statutory body, which is no small thing in the architecture of government, one would reasonably expect at least some document, such as a position paper, which lays out the justification for abolishing the VRGF and detailing where those functions will be delivered by government, how they will be implemented and how they will be evaluated. It would be useful to see such a document, if it exists.

Just last November, this Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, or PAEC, conducted an inquiry into gambling and liquor regulation in Victoria following up three Auditor-General reports. That inquiry did hear evidence that there were gaps in the foundation's effectiveness and raised questions about its ability to address the complex challenges posed by the current regulatory framework. The same committee heard that the VRGF should be reformed. Suggestions for reform included establishing an independent oversight body which could monitor the foundation's activities and ensure accountability. It would be multi-disciplinary, with experts in public health, addiction treatment and governance. The committee found:

From mid 2024 funding for the VRGF will be discontinued and the functions of the VGRF will be assumed by other government agencies. Significant work will be required by the VGRF's successors to fully

implement the Auditor-General's recommendations to prevent and protect the community from gambling harm.

So we ask: will any of these agencies that replace the VRGF be required to report on progress against the Auditor-General's 2020–2021 findings, or do these recommendations evaporate if the statutory authority that has been audited no longer exists? We also do not know if some of the existing problems will be solved. Will there be a process to ensure the identification and selection of relevant research topics and projects is independent? How can we be assured that the commissioning and publication of such research is efficient and effective? Will there be regular and independent reviews of the delivery and availability of gambling harm treatment services? This brings me to the second question I outlined earlier: what is the broader policy, legislative and operational context in which those functions will be delivered, and how does that inform this debate? The VRGF was set up to prevent and reduce gambling harm for all Victorians and so must the three agencies the government has now designated to perform those functions.

With my public health hat on, there is the proverbial ambulance at the bottom of the cliff analogy, which seems relevant here. You can have as many ambulances as you can afford, but unless you build a fence at the top of the cliff, people will continue to fall off – people will continue to suffer. By the way, speaking of ambulances, we know that only 22 per cent of those with a gambling disorder seek help, and three quarters of those have some form of mental illness. So it was good to see a motion passed at Labor's state conference calling out government inaction on implementing worker-specific treatment for drugs and alcohol and gambling.

Returning now to harm reduction: most of the harm reduction will come from the government deciding to limit how much, where and when gambling harm can be inflicted. Until we see those new limits, how can we properly assess how many gambling harm ambulances we will need at the bottom of that cliff? Apart from the opening hours, and now the break-in-play reforms that were hinted at in PAEC, the other indicators are not encouraging that significant reduction in harm will be achieved. Tax revenue from poker machines in Victoria is expected to keep rising after a dip next year anticipated from the introduction of forced early-morning closures. Evidence in PAEC hinted that mandatory minimum limits may not be part of the reform package. We know there are other actions the government could take to limit harm from gambling, from ending gambling advertising in public spaces to extinguishing unallocated licences. Without seeing the larger package of legislative reforms, we do not know if sensible things that reduce gambling are included. Given all of these unknown variables and the lack of information about what the gambling environment will be after the broader reform package, and measuring it against the terrible depth and impact of gambling harm that persists in Victoria, today we are unable to support the bill in its current form.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (12:35): Today I rise to add my contribution to the debate on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. I feel that in the country itself, in Australia, the conversation around gambling is starting to change. We have indeed been a country that likes to have punt, and gambling has been part of our culture, whether that be TattsLotto tickets, horse racing, casinos, betting on sport, and now we have got a culture around betting on our phones – betting on anything really. It is a culture that has shifted. But we are getting better at identifying those issues that we are seeing with problem gambling. We have those in our community who can gamble responsibly, but there are many in our community who cannot do that. I have heard some contributions about it being an addiction, and I certainly concur with those sorts of remarks. This is a health issue that we are now particularly dealing with in our communities, gambling.

When the conversations have changed and the evidence has changed, we in this place – I would probably like to confirm that it has been more this side of the chamber – have always been up for the debate and up for the reforms that are needed. If we have evidence in front of us and expert advice, regardless of what topic it is, we have a duty to listen, to look at that and to ask: 'What can we do here in this place to better our community with our legislation and reforms?' We have always been a party

to do that. This is another example of that, where we are modernising and listening to the experts to make some reform.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, established many years ago in 2012, was at the time a necessary step. We admit that. It was there to address that prevalence around problem gambling. However, as I have indicated, our understanding of gambling harm has matured, and so too must our strategies in addressing that.

Last year the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation announced some of our most significant packages in gambling reforms. These reforms included mandatory carded play, precommitments, standardised closing times, reducing load-up limits and slowing the spin rates. At the time I remember speaking in this place about the amount of people that those reforms were really addressing. It was estimated that around half a million Victorians are experiencing gambling harm, and it may be related to their own gambling habits but it may also be from someone else's gambling at their own cost – say, someone in their family. This cost is around \$7 billion annually, and this is leading to significant financial distress, mental health concerns and relationship issues. The reforms that we were making were really to ensure that patrons had adequate protection when they sat down at an electronic gaming machine at their local hotel or club, and it was to assist those people with problem gambling. I have heard comments too today about those electronic gaming machines being addictive; they are designed to be addictive. We know that some people can monitor themselves, but others cannot, and there are consequences and effects from that.

I will bring it back to my own electorate and my own area and region. It is pretty clear in terms of the amount of dollars spent in my region of the electorate of Bellarine, which covers the Geelong and the Borough of Queenscliffe local government areas. In April this year the amount lost by players from just over 1300 gaming machines was \$10,944,874.20. In March of the same year it had nearly reached \$12 million. These are absolutely large numbers. They seem ridiculous to me; it is incomprehensible. These figures are representing people that can gamble responsibly but also those people spending those dollars who are not – who are struggling to manage their gambling habits.

When the minister announced the reforms for this bill, it was that the functions of the current Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation would be transferred to other parts of government. The focus will be more on preventing and reducing gambling harm across our communities, so they will be put into other parts of the Victorian government departments. We need to take a public health response and approach to this.

Thanks in part to the foundation's own research, we do have a clearer understanding now of the multifaceted nature of gambling harm. Gambling harm comes in various forms, and also it is very often interconnected in many ways. Families of problem gamblers will face financial problems. It can lead to significant losses and family financial instability. Families may lose their homes, savings and other assets. There is also that emotional and psychological stress. When dealing with those financial instabilities, gamblers' behaviours can cause anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. There are also trust issues with that, with repeated broken promises and that financial secrecy. Persistent issues in gambling can also lead to a breakdown of relationships. There are social implications. Families that are dealing with gambling problems often withdraw from social activities and support networks due to the shame and the embarrassment or the lack of financial stability, and the stigma associated with that can lead to judgement and further isolation. And in extreme cases problem gamblers can resort to illegal activities, such as theft and fraud.

It is important to note that a 2017 study commissioned by the foundation found that up to 30 per cent of people presenting to primary care, alcohol and other drugs and mental health services were also experiencing problems with gambling. The replacement of this foundation with a new model of gambling harm prevention and response is focused on improving those services and integrating referral pathways across our social service system. This focus is grounded in best practice as well as

findings from major inquiries, including the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the recommendations that came out of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

I have just heard today, from sitting here for a few minutes, the other side's confusion, maybe, around this bill and the removal of this foundation. Like I said before, it is really about modernising it after we had expert advice provided to us. As a government, we must modernise and be responsive to that. The Victorian Auditor-General, though, also had a report, *Reducing the Harm Caused by Gambling*, and it was on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. This report concluded:

The Foundation does not know whether its prevention and treatment programs are effectively reducing the severity of gambling harm.

While the Foundation may help some people through its programs, it does not understand their broader impact. This is because the Foundation lacks an outcome-based framework to develop programs and measure their results.

In addition, while the Foundation funds research and program evaluation, it does not always use this evidence to improve program design and service delivery.

Maybe the other side might be able to get that report out and have a look at it. I encourage them to read that report to understand the reasoning behind this bill. These reforms have also been supported by others who have worked in this space, including the Alliance for Gambling Reform, who said:

We welcome the fact the budget – \$165m over four years is unchanged, and the functions of the disbanded ... Foundation ... will ... reflect more of a 'whole of government' approach ...

This is the reason why we have this bill in front of us today as well. Our government's new model of prevention and response therefore will be in several departments: the Department of Health and the Department of Justice and Community Safety as well. By adopting this bill, we are really taking a decisive step towards a more integrated, effective and compassionate approach to reducing gambling harm, and together we can support those that are affected by this to build a healthier and safer Victoria for all. I thank the minister for her work on this reform, and I am proud that we have a government that is ready and willing to make these reforms to help our most vulnerable.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:45): I too rise to speak on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024. I have stood here many times over the past six years or so since being elected, and in relation to the bills and legislative reform we have put before the house when it comes to gambling harm minimisation, it often makes me reflect on gambling within my own family. I feel like it skipped a generation with my sister and me but certainly found its way to my brother. I would not say he is someone who has an addiction to gambling, but he loves a good punt and loves being down at the local RSL or bowls club, having a cheap meal and cheap drinks with his friends and playing the pokies.

That was certainly something that I saw growing up with my nanna, the great Nanna Jean, who was a wonderful woman. She loved going to the same bowls club, and she often played the pokies when her pension came in. She was actually deaf, completely deaf, and I think part of the isolation for her was that Grandad had passed away many years prior. Being deaf – she went deaf at I think 50 or 60 – and having that kind of disability was really isolating. She loved going to the bowls club and she loved playing the pokies. I think she used to put in 5-cent pieces, because I remember she used to try and push them into our hands when we went down to the bowls club when we went with her for a meal and say, 'Oh, you've got to have a go, you've got to have a go.' It was something that was never passed on to my sister and me, but my brother certainly loves it.

But like Nanna Jean, her brother Les, who we would probably say today was someone who was an alcoholic, also had a gambling addiction, and he was a man who lost his family over it and was completely estranged from his children. You know, as you get older and you learn about family history, I think there was an element of family violence there as well – so alcoholism, addiction to gambling and family violence, the three things that have been talked about I think many, many times over in this chamber whilst contributions have been made on this bill.

This is a really important bill, and it is looking at the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, which functions as an important pillar of our gambling response, and seeking to basically update and modernise the roles and functions of the foundation by dismantling it and transferring these roles. This is something that I wholeheartedly support, and I say from the outset that I commend the bill to the house. It goes without saying that addressing mental health and addressing the social and financial impacts of problem gambling is something that has popped up time and time and time again on government agendas right across this country. We know that gambling harm impacts more than half a million Victorians either directly or indirectly. But what is worse is that it costs Victoria an estimated \$7 billion each and every single year, including over \$3 billion lost on poker machines alone – and that was a stat from 2022–23. It is something that I know has been raised time and time again with me.

The member for Kororoit spoke quite eloquently about the City of Brimbank having, I think she said, the highest number of people gambling and problem gamblers in the state. That is certainly not something that any local government wants to be recognised for – and indeed it is something time and time again for a number of local governments in my electorate of Laverton. As I always say, I have got the best of the west with the mighty four local governments that cross over in my electorate, but especially Brimbank and Wyndham. There are problems out there with gambling and the amount of money that venues are taking in from people with gambling addictions in my community. I acknowledge that those two local councils, Brimbank and Wyndham, in particular have been very vocal in their advocacy on this issue with very, very good reason, and I thank them very much for keeping me on my toes when it comes to gambling and what this government is doing in this space.

It is an issue that I heard about and discussed at length last year with the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) inquiry into gambling and alcohol legislation. The committee heard firsthand from stakeholders about how we are tracking when it comes to gambling reform in this state and what else we need to do. One of the really great things about governments is that when there are things that you need to do to improve outcomes for Victorians, whatever that is, governments should always be seeking to improve upon that and close those gaps to better support and empower sometimes, be what it may, Victorians regardless of their postcode, amount of money in their bank, where they come from and so on. That is what this government is doing. In that inquiry we were looking at how the state government is tracking, whether the legislation is working and what else we need to do. One of the things we certainly did hear, though, was that this is a problem that is highly complex. There is no particular silver bullet when it comes to minimising, reducing or completely wiping out gambling harm. It is something that presents itself in many, many ways, including feelings of regret – we heard about that – of shame, of guilt, of depression and of anxiety; abuse of alcohol and other drugs; and even more extremely, in forms of family violence. Another member, and I think it was the member for Kororoit, quite rightly pointed out it also presents itself in the form of suicide.

When you factor in these very serious mental and physical health issues it makes it harder to identify the particular root cause. As we heard in the inquiry from the executive clinical director of Turning Point, Australia's leading national addiction treatment organisation, people do not normally disclose that they are struggling with gambling harm, and we have a workforce that, quite frankly, does not understand it and what it is. There is a lot of shame; there is a lot of stigma. People struggle to talk about it, and we need to be able to break that down. In 2017 the foundation found that 30 per cent of people presenting to mental health community support services were experiencing problems with gambling and also around three-quarters of people presenting to a gambling service had mental health issues, so we know there are underlying problems there that we need to address. What we can learn from that is there is a major mismatch between our gambling harm treatment services and our mental health support services. What we need to do is we need to synchronise them more closely. They need to work together, and that is what the aim of this bill is.

This bill will build upon our government's previous commitments and our record on tackling this issue. Last year we did some great things, and they happened during the PAEC inquiry. Certainly we heard from organisations that work directly on the front line, supporting people to minimise their

gambling harm, about these reforms making direct inroads to assisting people and preventing gambling harm for those who had an addiction. Last year we committed to the mandatory precommitment of cashless gaming, we instituted uniform closing and opening times to prevent staggered gambling models and we lowered the speed, can you believe it, on new slot machines so that in future folks playing round after round on the pokies will not be throwing away so much money in the blink of an eye. I think that is a really good thing, whether Nanna Jean was here and she was putting in her 5-cent pieces or for my brother hoping that he will not lose so much in his pay cheque when he is playing the pokies. That was a really good thing. These are some really good steps that directly address just some of the issues that we are seeing on the ground.

But we need to look at the broader picture as well. That is what this bill is about. It is about taking the foundation, which I believe was set up 12 years ago, having a look at it and thinking about: does it reflect what we need today? The answer to that was ‘maybe not’. We need to do something else, and that is what this bill is going to. It is going to transfer those roles and responsibilities into other areas and other departments, which will be able to take a more hands-on approach and hopefully help improve and offer support to people and also their families that are suffering with gambling harm and having someone in their home that is addicted to gambling. I commend the bill to the house.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (12:55): I rise in support of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024, and I wish to commend the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation on this bill. As we all know, my background is as a clinical psychologist, and I have worked in addiction for a number of years, so I am delighted to see that we are making changes in this space. Gambling harm affects over half a million Victorians each year, whether directly or indirectly. The impacts of gambling, as we have heard many speakers say, are severe and multifaceted, manifesting in guilt, regret, shame, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, family violence and, unfortunately too often, suicide. Gambling affects working-class communities just like mine, including the suburbs that make up Mulgrave and that make up your own suburbs. The total net expenditure of the City of Greater Dandenong residents on pokies came to an immense \$137 million for the 2022–23 financial year, and for the City of Monash, which covers the northern half of my electorate, net expenditure was \$122 million in the same year.

Further to this is the significant impact that gambling has on multicultural communities just like mine. The Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria has suggested that a public health approach to gambling harm is required in order to reduce the shame and stigma many CALD communities feel. Such a move will create a shift for families and individuals experiencing gambling harm.

I just want to make mention of the language that we use when we talk about gambling harm, because that in itself can be problematic. Blaming people that gamble for their challenges and difficulties and for their actions is not on, and it actually makes that stigma worse. It makes the feelings of depression and anxiety a whole lot worse, and we are doing more harm to these individuals by stigmatising them with our language. We know that the foundation has put out a paper about the way that we talk about gambling, and I think maybe we need to make reference to that when we talk about gambling and its effects.

Under the new model proposed by this bill the prevention and programs function will be transferred to the Department of Health, and it makes sense. This strategic move is designed to leverage the department’s extensive expertise in community health and clinical mental health, ensuring a more holistic approach to service delivery. At its core, gambling harm is a health issue and is heavily correlated to other health concerns, and the health department is the best place for this to be handled. When gambling addictions are listed in the current editions of the World Health Organization’s *International Classification of Diseases* and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* you know that this is a health problem and needs to be best placed under the Department of Health. As someone who has worked in the space, I applaud this change.

I only have a couple of minutes, I am sure, so I will sum up my arguments here. The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024 really represents a pivotal step towards a more integrated, responsive and effective approach to gambling harm prevention and response. By redistributing the foundation's functions to more specialised and strategically aligned government agencies, we can better address the complexities of gambling harm and improve the lives of many Victorians. We need to see it covered by the health department.

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

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Regional Victoria

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. The budget provided only \$2 billion for regional Victorian infrastructure services and programs out of the \$98 billion allocated in the budget. When spruiking the budget, the Premier said:

Many regional families are doing it tough right now.

How is spending a mere 2 per cent of new infrastructure services and program funding helping regional families, who, by the Premier's own admission, are doing it tough?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I am delighted to answer a question from the Leader of the National Party about our government's investment in regional and rural Victoria, because I will have a debate with the Leader of the National Party every day of the week and twice on Sundays about how Labor governments are the only ones who make the investments that regional communities need and deserve.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: Those opposite, who are laughing right now, are also the ones that closed hospitals, closed schools and closed country train lines, who when they had the opportunity in government –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! If the noise level continues, members will be removed without warning.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to actually answering the question as to why only 2 per cent is being spent in regional Victoria rather than the mayo that is being put on the spin.

The SPEAKER: Order! Points of order need to be succinct. I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I absolutely reject any calculations put by the Leader of the National Party when it comes to investment in regional Victoria. I will say this: there are more people employed in regional Victoria than ever before. We have cut the unemployment rate in regional Victoria by nearly 3 per cent since the Leader of the National Party sat around the cabinet table. What we have also done since that period of time is we had to reinvest and rebuild, whether it was regional TAFE, regional rail or regional schools, because when the Leader of the National Party sat around the cabinet table he did not raise his voice to seek investments in those areas. His approach was one of cuts and closures.

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: The Leader of the National Party talked about regional communities facing cost-of-living pressures. I am happy to share with the Leader of the National Party the fact that regional

families will also get the school saving bonus. Regional families will absolutely get the school saving bonus, just like regional families also receive free TAFE, free kinder –

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, again, I draw the Premier's attention to the government's press release of Tuesday 7 May, where they bragged about \$2 billion for regional Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals will make his point of order succinctly. There is no point of order; the Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the National Party talked about regional communities and families feeling cost-of-living pressures. That is why in this year's budget we made additional investments and supports to assist regional families with the school saving bonus, by expanding the school breakfast program and by tripling access to the Glasses for Kids program, and of course this comes over and above a range of existing cost-of-living measures that we are already providing to support regional families, because –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, may I refer you to the Speaker Maddigan ruling, which I have referred you to before, that a response must deal with the question rather than responding generally. The Premier repeatedly responds to a topic but not the question. I put to you that that ruling, which was made on 26 August 2003, quite clearly says that a minister or the Premier should respond to the actual question rather than the topic.

The SPEAKER: I refer the Manager of Opposition Business to relevance. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, the Leader of the National Party asked about cost-of-living pressures in regional communities, and I am giving him –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was only part way through, Leader of the National Party – I am happy if you want an extension of time – the long list. Of course when you upgrade every regional line, buy new trains and add new services and you then go and cut regional transport fares, regional V/Line fares, you also support regional communities with some of their cost-of-living pressures. That is the focus that we will continue to have, not the cuts and closures of the Leader of the National Party.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:08): Twenty-five per cent of the state's population lives in regional Victoria. Why is the Premier denying them their fair share of investment?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): On Saturday night I was at a venue in Bendigo where just 24 hours earlier the Leader of the National Party was enjoying a chicken or beef dinner at his National Party state conference, and what we saw at that National Party state conference was what the National Party have to offer regional Victoria: nuclear waste sites. Nuclear energy sites were all the Leader of the National Party could bring to regional Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cranbourne is warned.

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

The SPEAKER: On debating the question, I ask the Premier to come back to the question that was asked. In terms of being unpleasant, I do not think that is in the standing orders.

Jacinta ALLAN: I think that just shows that our Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change has already had an impact.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Lowan withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: I am delighted to share with the Leader of the National Party some information that has been provided to me by the Treasurer. Over the Treasurer's 10 terrific budgets, more than \$42 billion has been invested in regional Victoria, a 233 per cent increase on what the Leader of the National Party was ever able to deliver.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: gendered violence

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (14:11): This government is continuing to drive nation-leading policy and investment in family violence prevention. We are very clear: we will pull every lever available to us to end family violence and end violence against women and girls. This morning we announced our strengthening women's safety package. This package covers over \$100 million and continues to build on the strong foundations laid with the nation's first Royal Commission into Family Violence.

I thank our amazing sector, our workforce and our victim-survivors, including the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council, who have sat with me at many round tables, who have met with me and the Premier and who have shared their knowledge and their experience – people who maintain their energy and their passion to keep working to support change, as do we. We are responding to the centuries-old challenge of gendered violence and the ongoing need to strengthen women's and children's safety. Our new package responds to the need to increase therapeutic supports, to further enhance our groundbreaking central information point, to keep more women and children safe in their homes and to better understand people, particularly men, who choose to use violence. And we will be doing so much more. In 2016 Conor Pall, deputy chair of VSAC, was, in his words, an invisible survivor of family violence. Today he joined us as an advocate and told us that he feels as a victim-survivor that he is now seen, including by this government – that he is no longer invisible.

I will finish this how I started: by thanking all of our victim-survivors and by thanking our incredible sector workers, who are there every day to support victim-survivors, who are holding perpetrators accountable and who are delivering urgently needed therapeutic supports. And I thank the community for working with us. I particularly thank those men who are answering our call, like the member for Mordialloc, to join with us and end family violence and end violence against women and girls.

TAFE funding

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. Of the 1514 people who enrolled in a certificate IV in plumbing under the free TAFE program, only 18 graduated, a completion rate of less than 1 per cent. There are drastically low completion rates in building and construction, with only 33 per cent of students finishing their course. Why is the Labor government's free TAFE system failing?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): I thank the member for Evelyn, who represents Lilydale TAFE, which is only open because this Labor government unlocked the gates, the giant padlocks, that the Liberal government put on the TAFE campus. Are you going to tell me I am wrong?

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, Labor has been in power for 10 years. This is about completion rates, and I would like to table the completion rates as well.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to make their points of order succinctly without elaboration. The Premier was so far being relevant and was giving some background.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course you can only provide free TAFE once you have rebuilt, reinvested and reopened TAFE campuses that were closed, cut – teachers sacked – by the former federal Liberal–National government. We are proud of the more than \$4.6 billion we have invested in Victoria’s TAFE network since 2015. We have added free TAFE to the opportunities for young Victorians to reduce barriers to being able to pursue an education opportunity, to pursue their career of choice, and it is another cost-of-living measure of course that is providing support to young people.

In terms of the question around TAFE completions and particularly free TAFE being used as a pathway into pursuing plumbing as an opportunity, one of the key factors behind particularly a young person coming into TAFE through free TAFE and then perhaps not completing that qualification is because they are out there on the job. They have got an apprenticeship; they have gone and got an apprenticeship. We know that free TAFE is a pathway.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, regarding being factual and succinct, we know that apprenticeships have dropped by nearly 13 per cent under this Labor government here in Victoria, and I would also like to table that data.

The SPEAKER: Member for Evelyn, I ask you to make your points of order succinctly. I will rule it out of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course you could not do your plumbing TAFE course at Lilydale campus, which was closed by those opposite. You cannot study at a TAFE campus that is closed or where the teachers have been sacked.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Bentleigh withdrew from chamber.

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

The SPEAKER: The Premier was referring to TAFE and enrolments. She was being relevant, and she was not debating the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, free TAFE is an entry point. It reduces a barrier to entry, and it is a good outcome if a young person who has their barrier to being able to go and participate in education or training removed because of free TAFE is then able to use that as a pathway into an apprenticeship. That is a good outcome, and that is why we will continue to support our TAFEs and continue to back in free TAFE for Victorians.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:17): Victoria’s TAFE is the lowest funded in the country. Labor has spent nearly \$221 million in taxpayers money on free TAFE courses that students are failing to complete. Why are thousands of students failing to complete Labor’s TAFE courses?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): Well, the cat is out of the bag. Those opposite would cut free TAFE if they were given the chance. They would cut free TAFE.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I value TAFE, unlike this Labor government –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Evelyn will resume her seat. There is no point of order.

Bridget Vallence: On a further point of order, Speaker, question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I do not know that the Premier had specifically attacked the opposition in her introductory commentary.

Jacinta ALLAN: The member for Evelyn talked about our investment in free TAFE as a waste. Let me say this: our investment in free TAFE has helped more than 170,000 students into free training. Not only has it reduced that barrier to entry; it has also saved these 170,000 students almost \$460 million since we introduced this initiative. This is why free TAFE is so important. This is why we will not cut TAFE.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question went to nearly \$220 million in taxpayer dollars that has been spent on students not completing. The Premier referred to \$460 million. There is only 52 per cent on average, and down to nearly 1 per cent, of students finishing courses.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order, member for Evelyn?

Bridget Vallence: It is on relevance and being factual.

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

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: How is race 4 going? What has happened at race 4? The Warrnambool races were last week.

The SPEAKER: Order! Premier, through the Chair.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will share this with the member for Evelyn: of those 170,000 students, more than 87,000 were women – women who were able to pursue an opportunity. You cannot pursue an opportunity at a TAFE campus that was closed by a Liberal government. Under Labor you can have a free TAFE opportunity at our strong and vibrant TAFE networks.

Ministers statements: gendered violence

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:21): Every woman should be able to live safely in their community without fear of violence. One woman is killed by an intimate partner nearly every week, one in three women have experienced physical violence by the age of 15, one in five women have experienced sexual violence by the age of 15 and one in two women have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime. And this is an absolute disgrace. Thirty women have been killed in Australia just this year, six of those here in Victoria, and their deaths have placed a spotlight on an epidemic of family and gender-based violence that women are experiencing in this country. Incidents of sexual violence reported to Victoria Police have increased by 64 per cent and Aboriginal women are over 45 times more likely to experience family violence, and it must stop.

We are working hard to end family violence, but we know we have more work to do. Today's package that was announced by the Premier includes a new justice navigation pilot for victim-survivors of sexual assault, and we are providing additional support for at-risk communities – like First Nations women, like refugee women, like migrant women – helping victim-survivors at every stage of their recovery, with a boost for targeted legal services. We are also establishing a working women's centre to provide for women experiencing gender violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, where quite often these behaviours start. This is not just a women's issue but ultimately a matter of stopping men's violence towards women. This government is doing everything it can to keep all women safe.

Suburban Rail Loop

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Labor have consistently refused to reveal the cost of SRL East, including in the latest budget. How can Victorians have confidence that the major changes the minister announced today will not blow out the SRL's cost and timeline?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:23): I thank the shadow minister for his question. The Suburban Rail Loop is a fantastic project which is going to completely transform the way in which Melburnians commute around our city, and it is going to make sure that we provide more housing options for Victorians as well. We have consistently said that the project will cost between \$30 billion and \$34.5 billion and will be delivered by 2035.

The budget paper reference that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition refers to relates to some of the initial funding and package of works. On the first package of works, a contract was entered into late last year, and that project came in under our expected targeted cost, and I advised PAEC of that when I appeared before them. We are currently out to market for the second tunnelling package, we are currently out to market for the two station boxes packages and we are also out to market for the line-wide package, which will be to operate the whole line. We are actively out there in the marketplace. It would be irresponsible to disclose what we expect those packages of works will be because we would be disclosing our negotiating position. I do not think the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party would think that that would be a smart move. As I have consistently said, the project will be delivered by 2035 and the estimated range is between \$30 billion and \$34.5 billion.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, will the project cost more or less?

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded his response to the main question.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:25): More than 1 million cubic metres of contaminated soil will be dug up during the first stage of the Suburban Rail Loop. This includes soil that falls under the most toxic classification. Can the minister guarantee that there are enough facilities in Victoria to dispose of the contaminated soil?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:26): It is important to note that the route that the SRL will traverse from Cheltenham to Box Hill is in an area which has basically been predominantly used for housing and agricultural purposes since 1835. There is very, very little in the way of contamination. There is a small amount of contamination around Cheltenham, and in relation to any soil that is identified as being contaminated, it will be disposed of through a licensed facility.

Ministers statements: gendered violence

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:26): The Allan Labor government is committed to ensuring that Victoria Police and our justice system have the tools they need to hold perpetrators of gendered violence to account. Victoria Police arrest a family violence offender every 18 minutes, and we know some 95,000 Victorians, predominantly women and girls, are affected by family violence every year. Through our record \$4.5 billion investment in Victoria Police we have established some 29 family violence units across the state, supporting 415 specialist family violence investigators, backed by the first ever family violence command. We have established our \$11.5 million family violence centre of learning at the police academy to train recruits.

Today I am pleased to advise that our government will provide enduring protection for victim-survivors by strengthening family violence intervention orders. This includes introducing a presumption of a new standard minimum length for FVIOs. Currently most orders are between six and 12 months. Victims can then be required to retestify, a process that we know can be deeply retraumatising. Our reforms will put the accountability on perpetrators for their behaviour instead of requiring victims to prove they are not safe again and again. We will also explore giving police the power to directly issue FVIOs or longer family violence safety notices to better protect victims and give them certainty and legal protections on the spot. We also know some perpetrators deliberately avoid service of these orders, and we will be making changes to the service process to ensure through

post or email delivery that the safety of victims is in place much sooner. We also will examine improvements to personal safety intervention orders to create stronger protections for victims of stalking, in line with the recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission. I will continue working closely with the Attorney-General in the other place as these reforms are finalised and legislation is drafted. Community safety remains the Allan Labor government's number one priority, and this new women's safety package will continue to see that we lead the nation in the prevention of family violence.

Onshore conventional gas

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:28): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Yesterday the minister contradicted the Victorian government's own gas report, led by scientist Dr Amanda Caples. On the report, former Minister Pulford said in 2022:

... restarting our onshore conventional gas industry could inject valuable new gas into the market for Victorians ...

Why has the minister failed to restart our onshore conventional gas industry?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:29): I thank the member for the question. There was nothing contradictory at all in the comments that I made yesterday to previous questions by the member on this subject matter. I have been very clear: if anyone out there thinks that they can find gas onshore through conventional means, they are welcome to approach the department or me and seek an exploration permit. They will have the ability to apply for an exploration permit through the usual means, and it is open for them to do so. The reality is this: those opposite fail to want to grasp the reality that the lead scientist in Victoria, AEMO and the ACCC have been really clear that there are insufficient reserves of gas that are coming on line to meet the demands of Victorians, and we need to be ready with alternatives in place. The facts are clear. Some may want to live in denial. You know why? Because they are pursuing an ideology instead of the geology of this, frankly.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. The question was why the minister has failed to restart our onshore conventional gas industry.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister will come back to the question.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: There is no barrier to conventional onshore gas exploration in Victoria. In fact it was actually lifted a handful of years ago after a previous coalition government put a moratorium not just on coal seam gas exploration and fracking; they actually extended that to include a moratorium on conventional onshore gas. Three opportunities they had. The first one was a moratorium on coal seam gas and fracking under your government in 2012; we were in opposition. They added to that towards the end of 2012, and in 2014 they put the cherry on the icing on the cake. That is what they did. We restarted onshore conventional gas opportunities for those that are prepared to come forward if they believe that there is gas to be found onshore.

The reality is that these proponents of the gas industry report to the ACCC and they report to AEMO, and they have been very clear that there is insufficient prospective gas that is available to come on line to meet our needs. That is the reality of it. Stop putting your ideology in the way of geology and the facts of the matter. I will take my advice from the experts any day. This government will always act on the expert advice and take leadership action to ensure that Victorians have a secure energy supply, whether it is electricity or gas, and that is exactly what we will get on and do.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:33): In question time yesterday the minister advised that the Australian Energy Market Operator said – and I quote – new Victorian production of gas that is due in 2024 is anticipated to be zero and, in 2025, zero. Labor has been in power for a decade and approved

no gas exploration projects. Why has the government failed to ensure a steady gas supply for Victorians?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Treasurer, would you like to answer the question?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:33): There is a previous resources minister who would be very happy to answer the question of course. On the supplementary question, the answer to that question was in my primary answer, which is that for a number of years there were moratoriums put in place by those opposite, who do not actually want to own that decision or those three decisions that they made. They do not want to own any of that. A number of assessments and analyses were conducted over a period of years, and the lead scientist reached a conclusion around the prospectivity of onshore conventional gas availability here in Victoria and made it very clear that there were no proven or known resources available for us. That is the reality. I cannot approve an exploration permit if no-one comes forward and seeks an exploration permit. The option is open, and I would welcome any that do come forward.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: gendered violence

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:34): Getting a good education is more than just getting good marks; it is about becoming a member of society, living a life of purpose and making sure you do everything you can to be a full member of our community. That is why many of us in this chamber heard Rosie Batty speak recently when she launched her book *Hope* upstairs. We heard her speak passionately about how the 1950 Respectful Relationships schools right across our state under the Allan Labor government are making a real difference in targeting toxic masculinity but also promoting positive masculinity and calling out gender-related violence. That is why Premier Allan today announced more support for the Respectful Relationships initiative, making sure we target and model respect and equality for all our young people that are growing up, because all the evidence shows that education is the key to ending the vicious cycle of family violence, which is why teaching Respectful Relationships at school is so important.

We all have a role to play. I have a role to play and the member for Mordialloc has a new role to play, and can I also congratulate the member for Albert Park on becoming the Parliamentary Secretary for Education and on the important work she will do with me as we continue the rollout of Respectful Relationships right across all sectors of the education system. We all heard Rosie Batty, and just recently she addressed the national press. She said:

More than 94 per cent of perpetrators are men. We must hold those perpetrators to account, yes, but we must also instil in our boys something better than this narrow and damaging definition we use to describe a 'real man'.

...

We must teach them instead that being stoic, tough and in control means nothing without ... being compassionate, thoughtful and kind.

That is what the Respectful Relationships initiative under the Allan Labor government is all about: instilling in our young boys and our young people the respect that they need to have to make sure that all people of all backgrounds know that gender-related violence is not on and that you show respect in the classroom and respect at home.

Government performance

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:37): My question is to the Premier. This week the Deputy Premier claimed airport rail could be built at the same time as SRL East. The energy minister claimed there is no gas to be extracted in Victoria, but the Deputy Premier promoted its continued use. The secretary of DPC –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will be heard in silence.

John PESUTTO: This week the Deputy Premier claimed airport rail could be built at the same time as SRL East. The energy minister claimed there is no gas to be extracted in Victoria, but the Deputy Premier promoted its continued use. The secretary of DPC undermined the Premier on building 80,000 homes. How can Victorians trust that the Premier is the right person to lead in these times when her cabinet is at war with each other?

Members interjecting.

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

Members for Sunbury and Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:38): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and it is pretty clear that the member for Polwarth and the member for Croydon do not attend tactics committee. You would not have blessed that question; you are too busy writing a letter. You are getting your lawyers writing letters about the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition talks about listening to things that people say. I wonder what his colleagues opposite think when they listen to the Leader of the Opposition about his position on Moira Deeming? What do your colleagues think about that? I think what we are seeing is that the Leader of the Opposition has focused on how we are getting on with –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, the question was directly about differences of policy between senior ministers in the government. Can I ask you to draw the Premier back to the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I am delighted to share with the Leader of the Opposition differences of policy. We will not allow nuclear energy into this state. I can say that absolutely clearly to the Leader of the Opposition. I can also say this absolutely clearly to the Leader of the Opposition – he asked about building more homes in Victoria: we will not demonise migrants as we get on and build more homes, like the federal Liberal Party are. We have not heard any rebuke from the Leader of the Opposition on that one, now, have we? So we can only assume there is no difference of policy on that position between the federal and state Liberal Party leaders. I will also say this to the Leader of the Opposition: we absolutely have a difference of view with you –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 120, I personally find the Premier's continuing reference to migrants offensive. As someone who is married to someone who came to this country, I find the continual attacks personally offensive.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will absolutely continue to stand up for migrants in this state. I will not accept the crocodile tears from the member for Brighton or the Leader of the Opposition, because we are standing with and supporting our migrant communities.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 120, the Premier has for a second time directly referred to me. I found the comment the Premier just made personally offensive. Three

times this week I have raised standing order 120. I would say, as the Premier has referred to me directly, clearly I am entitled to find that personally offensive.

The SPEAKER: Just for clarification, member for Brighton, are you seeking a withdrawal?

James Newbury: Absolutely.

The SPEAKER: Then you need to state that in your point of order. I ask the Premier to withdraw.

Jacinta ALLAN: I withdraw, but I will not withdraw from standing up for migrants in this state.

The SPEAKER: Without clarification.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will not withdraw from standing up for –

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has been asked to withdraw unconditionally.

Jacinta ALLAN: And I did; I withdraw. And I will go on with answering the Leader of the Opposition's question.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier did not do so unconditionally.

The SPEAKER: I believe the Premier did withdraw and went on to complete her answer.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will continue to support Victoria as a state that is welcoming of migrants. We will not use migrants, demonise migrants, as a reason why we have challenges with housing affordability and availability, as we are seeing out of the Liberal Party in Canberra. That is what we are seeing out of Canberra. We are also seeing the Liberal Party want to bring nuclear energy to Victoria. We also know the question was about differences of opinion and differences on policy. It is only we in the Labor government who are fully committed to supporting treaty in this state. The Leader of the Opposition cannot say that and the Leader of the National Party cannot say that, because again they are choosing to go down a path of division. That is all we have. The Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about division. He wants to drive division in our migrant communities, division in our First Peoples communities, division on energy policy –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, we are not going to take lectures from a party that uses migrant communities for branch-stacking purposes. Let me make it clear –

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

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, are you showing contempt to the Speaker?

John Pesutto: Of course not, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: If members wish to raise points of order, they will do so appropriately. That was not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Finally, questions on division from the Leader of the Opposition come from a fundamental position of weakness reflecting the deep divisions among the people who sit behind him.

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

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:45): Given the Deputy Premier is at odds with the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the Minister for Energy and Resources, does the Premier have full confidence in the Deputy Premier?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:46): The answer is yes. The real question is: what does the member for Polwarth have to think about the Leader of the Opposition – or the member for Croydon or the member for Rowville?

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. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Berwick can leave the chamber for half an hour. Off you go.

Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: gendered violence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:47): This morning I was asked by a journalist if there should be more done to hold toxic social influencers to account. Of course when I was asked this question I said yes, but what I really wish I had said was ‘Abso-bloody-lutely we should’. I debated whether I should mention this person or give this person any airtime, but as Premier I owe it to Victorian families to be honest and up-front about the growing trend of young men and boys watching Andrew Tate’s content. It is dangerous. For those who are not well versed in Andrew Tate, not only is he a far-right influencer, he is currently facing trial for rape and human trafficking. Online he is preaching the most disgusting and the most misogynist poison.

I will share with you just a couple of choice examples. There is a long, long list to choose from. For example: ‘If you put yourself in a position to be raped, you must bear some responsibility.’ He also made this comment: ‘I think the women belong to the man.’ This individual has taken toxic masculinity and thrown petrol on it. We know that this is having an impact on young men and young boys and having an impact on women in this state. That is why as Premier, as a mum and as a woman it makes me furious, and it is why I am acting.

Today we announced a new package of reforms that will change laws and will change culture and deliver a new support package for victim-survivors when they need it the most. We have fought for so long and so hard for women and girls to be safe and respected. We should speak up, we should give voice to this toxic masculinity, because we deserve to be safe, we deserve to be respected, and women’s and girls’ lives depend on us speaking up.

The SPEAKER: The time for questions has ended. We will now move to constituency questions.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, constituency question 548 to the Minister for Children, regarding the Waterfall Gully kindergarten and their leaking roof, still is unanswered. It is important for this kindergarten as we move towards those wet winter months. I was hoping you could have that addressed, please.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, I have an overdue response to a question that I asked on 19 March. It was due on 18 April from the Minister for Environment regarding wild dogs. I ask you to pursue that with the minister. It is a matter I have raised in the past, so I am keen for an answer, as are my constituents.

The SPEAKER: Member for Lowan, could you give that list to the Clerk, please?

Constituency questions

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:50): (670) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. How will the new Truganina CFA station benefit my community of Tarneit? Despite its name as the Truganina CFA station, the brand new station has been built in Tarneit on the corner of Leakes and

Davis roads, giving a brand new home base to the Truganina fire brigade. Our patch in Melbourne's west is growing rapidly, so making sure that we have enough emergency fire services to keep our community safe is absolutely paramount. I want to say a huge thankyou to all of our firefighters for their hard work and unwavering dedication. Your tireless efforts ensure that our neighbourhoods remain safe, allowing us to live with peace of mind. I also want to thank the former member for Tarneit and current member for Laverton for her work on this project, and I look forward to joining her at the official opening this Saturday.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:51): (671) My constituency question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. When will the minister fund a new ambulance for the Drouin ambulance branch to ensure they have the equipment they need to protect our community? Drouin and Warragul are the two fastest growing communities in Australia. This station is currently staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but they have inadequate equipment to respond to the ever-increasing number of call-outs they are receiving. Drouin ambulance officers are responding to 34 per cent of all call-outs in the Baw Baw local government area. They have seen an 11 per cent growth in code 1 calls. Particularly difficult is the 12-hour period from 10 am to 10 pm every day. I urge the minister to hear the calls of the local officers and the community and respond as quickly as possible to this request.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:52): (672) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Just a few weeks ago, before the budget, our government announced that as part of the Growth Areas Public Transport Fund Wyndham would be receiving a whopping \$39.4 million to establish a new fixed and modified bus service to replace the Tarneit North FlexiRide service currently operating in my electorate in Truganina. As the minister knows, we have had a very active bus campaign going on in Trug, and the one thing we have been hearing quite a bit about is the Tarneit North FlexiRide service, which has been operating since the end of 2022. It has in many ways been a victim of its own success, with the demand being more than the app can provide for. This tells us that there is very high demand and we need a more permanent bus route to service this area. My question for the minister is this: how will this new route that is being funded benefit Truganina commuters in the Laverton electorate?

Lowan electorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:54): (673) My constituency question is to the Minister for Mental Health. The information that I seek is: when will mental health locals be established in my electorate, particularly in the communities of Horsham and Hamilton? Just over a year ago, in fact a year yesterday, on 29 May 2023, the government released a media release titled 'More local mental healthcare across Victoria'. Within this media release it makes it very, very clear that there will be another 12 services where planning work has commenced to establish mental health locals in Melbourne, Werribee, Truganina, Ballarat, Craigieburn, Sunbury, Ringwood, Horsham, Ararat and Warrnambool–Hamilton–Portland. I know of somebody at the moment who has a 12-year-old girl who is suicidal. The father cannot get support for her. He is sleeping on her floor every night so she does not hurt herself. I urge the government to immediately let my community know when this – *(Time expired)*

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:55): (674) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding disability access at the Ballarat train station, a timely question following the excellent session today with the Victorian Disability Advisory Council. As a part of the Regional Rail Revival program, I was so proud that the Ballarat line upgrade delivered a second platform and track at the Wendouree station as well as an accessible pedestrian overpass, but I know there is always more to do. That is why the Allan Labor government is delivering the Ballarat station

upgrade by 2026. My question for the minister is: how will the Ballarat station upgrade improve accessibility to train services and the station precinct for my community? We look forward to developing a further understanding in greater detail from the Level Crossing Removal Project delivery agency about this project. I look forward to receiving the minister's response on this project, which will be transformative for my community, particularly for people with disability.

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:56): (675) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: what can be done to improve pedestrian safety at the intersection of Sydney Road, Boundary Road and Queens Parade in Fawkner? Local resident Lisa Arnold is recovering at home after being in hospital because she was injured while crossing the intersection of Sydney Road and Boundary Road some weeks ago. Victorian road crash data has identified that the intersection has had six pedestrian crashes in the last five years. Lisa and other local residents have suggested red arrows for drivers turning both left and right during pedestrian crossing times, increased lighting throughout the intersection and pedestrian crossing warning signals to help increase safety. Being able to safely cross the road is fundamental to the livability of our suburbs and the health and wellbeing of our residents. I am thankful for the work the Minister for Roads and Road Safety has done in this regard, and I am really pleased that we have a Minister for Public and Active Transport now. I am also thankful for the work of Walk On Merri-bek convener Andrea Bunting in her advocacy for pedestrian safety, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:57): (676) My question is to the Minister for Police. When does the minister intend to provide additional resources to Knox police to address the rising youth crime hotspots in Wantirna South? 854 constituents signed a petition calling on the government to tackle youth crime in Wantirna South. Residents are witnessing the rise in crime with their own eyes. At a community crime summit with police, locals spoke of seeing home invasions and thefts on a weekly basis and no longer feeling safe leaving their homes. The writing is literally on the wall, with youth crime up 30 per cent and the government still negligently failing to keep Victorians safe. Crime in Knox is up 14 per cent, and residents are just terrified to leave their homes, yet this government has cut community crime prevention by 46 per cent in the recent budget and now refuses to even pay police their fair share. I look forward to hearing how the police minister intends to keep residents in Rowville safe.

Ripon electorate

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (14:58): (677) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, what is the government doing to improve the Sunraysia Highway in my electorate? This critical stretch of road travels through the heart of Ripon, including through Learmonth, Waubra, Lexton, Avoca, Stuart Mill and St Arnaud. It is a vital route for farmers, freight operators and the community, with more freight trucks travelling along the Sunraysia Highway than ever before. Many locals have raised concerns with me about speed limits along the highway in Waubra, narrow seal widths and shoulder sealings, restricted overtaking opportunities, a lack of rest areas and restricted visibility at some intersections. I was proud to host the Sunraysia Highway Improvement Committee in Parliament recently to share many of these issues directly with the minister. It is important we make improvements to this vital highway for the benefit of so many communities. I look forward to providing locals with the minister's response.

Warrandyte electorate

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:59): (678) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the government fix the dangerous intersection of Marbert Court and Kangaroo Ground-Warrandyte Road, where a man tragically lost his life in a crash two weeks ago? My constituent Kim Williams, who lives on Marbert Court, raised safety concerns about the intersection

with my predecessor in 2020, who too had raised it with the minister, as many residents felt that an accident was inevitable due to the road's design. Sadly, on 12 May their worst fears were realised when a motorcyclist was killed and another was left clinging to life in hospital. This has devastated the local community and left residents of Marbert Court scared and shocked. Every day residents turning in and out of the court face this dangerous intersection in fear. Minister, I implore you to urgently investigate and implement critical safety improvements at this intersection.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:00): (679) My constituency question is for the Premier, and my question is: will the family violence protection package actually help the Mildura multidisciplinary centre and their desperate need for expansion, with the highest rate of family violence in the state? The Mallee sexual assault unit and the Mallee domestic violence unit operate under the MDC, and they have been promised a new facility – in fact a building and land were purchased several years ago in the legal district in Mildura – to allow better connectivity with the police and the sexual offences and child abuse investigation team. In my very first month in this role I met with the teams, including Victoria Police members, and examined the plans that have been sitting idle for years. I ask the Premier if this new package will finally fund the expanded centre in Mildura and actually help victims and survivors of sexual assault and family violence. It is time for this government to put its money where its mouth is.

David Southwick: Speaker, on a point of order, there are a number of unanswered questions that I wish to raise, and I have raised these in the chamber before with you: question 1109 to the Minister for Public and Active Transport and question 1108 and adjournment 581 to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Could you follow those up please, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Could you hand the list to the Clerk, please, member for Caulfield.

Bills

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (15:01): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Nuclear energy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (15:02): I move:

That this house:

- (1) condemns the federal opposition's plan to send energy bills sky-high with dangerous and expensive nuclear power;
- (2) calls on the leader and deputy leader of the Victorian opposition to rule out nuclear reactors on the Great Ocean Road or in any Victorian community.

There is no doubt about it: nuclear power is toxic, dangerous and the most expensive form of new energy that you can build – indeed of energy at all. That is why on this side of the house, as Labor is in government, we will never entertain it. The reality is this: our coal-fired generators are getting older

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and they are getting less reliable, and we need to make sure that the replacement power that is built is clean, genuinely clean, in terms of emissions and of course the cheapest to build, and we know that it is exactly what renewable energy projects bring to us. We simply do not have time to wait for nuclear power plants to be built, even if they were somehow desirable. We need new renewable energy generation in the system as quickly as possible to keep the lights on and to keep prices down.

Our government, the Allan Labor government, is committed to bringing down power prices for Victorians, and that is exactly what we are doing. As testament to the effort that we have put in to this space and the transition, the new Victorian default offer last week was released, with electricity bills for households on the VDO going down by an average of \$100 from 1 July this year. And Victorians on the default offer are paying the lowest electricity prices in the national market. The VDO is \$311 less than the average household default market offer in New South Wales and other states. Some people want to be in denial about the facts, about the evidence, but the evidence speaks for itself, and the evidence will be in people's energy bills from 1 July. That is great news for small businesses as well, with their VDO going down by an average of \$261, a huge \$1290 less than the average default market offer in other states.

Victorians have the lowest power prices in the country because our record renewable energy investments are clear, and we continue to grow our ambition and make Victoria the most welcoming state when it comes to the build of new replacement renewable energy for Victorians. That is how you reduce power prices for Victorians – with renewables, the cheapest form of new-build electricity generation on the market. What you do not do is the exact opposite of that and play with the notion of introducing nuclear power here in Victoria and in the same breath claim that you are concerned about the cost of living for Victorians and energy prices.

Victorians can be assured that a Labor government will never slug them with nuclear energy, the most expensive energy that there is. The CSIRO estimates that nuclear would cost around 400 per cent more than renewables and a reactor would not even be finished – if it were to be built – until at least 2040. So what is the answer now? Some are pursuing ideology here in terms of the energy transition, an ideology which is not grounded in fact or evidence or indeed prospectivity in terms of when a potential power station powered by nuclear could ever be built. So it is absolutely not providing any solutions for anyone. Our government is absolutely clear that we will never go down the road of toxic and expensive nuclear energy, but we know that for those opposite you cannot say the same. Much like a nuclear atom, the coalition are absolutely split on this, and the consequences are about tearing themselves down and failing to look the evidence in the face and work on behalf of Victorians.

When the right wing of their party comes calling, Peter Dutton gets on the phone: 'Johnny, roll over, mate; we're going to need to build nuclear power because I need this to win a federal election.' Guess what, no-one seems to want it – go to any community across Victoria – other than those politicians who pass motions at their state conferences or councils that say we need nuclear energy. They are not listening to Victorians. They are trying to have a bet each way on this. After allowing a pro-nuclear party room to run rampant on this, he is now trying to walk it back and pretend that somehow he is in control of this issue. That is exactly what we are faced with from the Leader of the Opposition. Even his own Shadow Minister for Energy, Affordability and Security brushed off calls for them to rule out nuclear energy by saying it is a matter for the federal government.

Well, big news – newflash – we have legislation in Victoria that prohibits nuclear energy. It prohibits the mining of uranium and certainly prohibits the building of nuclear energy plants. So that is not a federal government matter. I want the opposition here in Victoria to put it on the record that they will not change or seek to change laws in Victoria to allow Peter Dutton to come in and put a nuclear power plant in Anglesea, in the Latrobe Valley or wherever else they think is suitable for nuclear power. That is what the responsibility of the Leader of the Opposition is, not to pretend that it is not a matter for him – it is a matter for him. It is a matter for him, and he ought to come clean and stop trying to have it both ways to keep his party room in control, in check. You have got to take the pulse on the

opposition every morning when you wake up – are they still around, are they still alive? We do not know, but the fact is –

James Newbury interjected.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: The news is very clear: stand up for Victorians and rule out changing the laws in Victoria or, if you are not prepared to rule it out, tell Victorians where they are going to have these nuclear power plants. Victoria has its own prohibition on nuclear energy generation. That is what we need to hear from them. The federal government does not make the decision on this restriction; a future coalition government, if they were ever elected, would be making that decision.

We will never grant any nuclear facility planning approvals in this state. That is absolutely rock solid, and we have never deviated from that position. Victorians do not want it. It creates toxic waste that stays in our environment for more than centuries – millennia. It is the most expensive form of new energy that you can impose on Victorians' bills, and it is not available here and now – today. This is an argument that is being perpetuated by those people who want to put a pause on investment confidence when it comes to renewable energy. They want to cause uncertainty in the market so that if there is any potential for nuclear energy to be built or pursued in a policy sense by either a Commonwealth coalition government or a future coalition government in Victoria, they can slow down the transition. When you do that you are actually forcing up people's power bills; that is what you are doing when you are slowing down the transition.

Let us also be very clear: language matters here, because language and what you say is what you are judged by. Just a couple of months ago the Leader of the Opposition was saying nuclear would be part of the energy mix. Now he is not saying that of course; he says it is not. He will say anything to appease the right-wingers in his party when it suits him. The Nationals over there are off on their own frolic. In March of this year on ABC radio the Leader of the Opposition said:

... nuclear will almost certainly play a part in our energy mix going forward.

That was on 24 March on ABC radio. We cannot forget that the member for Caulfield said, in reference to nuclear energy, in October last year on 3AW, 'I wouldn't rule anything out.' Wow – you would not rule out increasing people's power bills. That is what that means. You would not rule out increasing people's power bills and you would not rule out promoting nuclear reactors in people's backyards without any commentary at all on what you would do with the toxic waste. A member for Western Victoria in the other place is avowedly pro nuclear, even putting out a media release in November 23 saying 'the future is nuclear'.

Perhaps that is why just last week the Leader of the Opposition refused to rule out nuclear energy at a press conference. His position may now be to equivocate on this issue, but Victorians can see right through that. When you stay silent or mince your words or prevaricate or equivocate, what you are doing is trying to send a signal to the people in your party room not to basically end your career. This is what this is about. It is about keeping people sweet in the party room that are gung-ho on nuclear – gung-ho on it. They are gung-ho on so many things that are effectively against the interests of Victorians, especially with the cost-of-living problems that Victorians are experiencing now. The coalition, whether it is the state or federal parties, want to go nuclear, and it is Victorians who are going to be picking up the bill. Be honest, be up-front on this. Rule it out and rule it out properly, or indeed tell us what the plan is. Or are you just sitting by the phone waiting for Peter Dutton to give you his marching instructions? Just last week we had the shadow energy minister on Sky News refusing to say whether he would try and overturn our state's ban on fracking. Today they are actually refusing to say whether they would rule out giving approvals for these expensive, toxic and dangerous nuclear facilities. It is very simple: if you will not give these projects their approvals, then say so. Otherwise Victorians cannot trust the Leader of the Opposition and his party to stand up to Peter Dutton and the right wing of his party.

Victorians know what they are getting with a Labor government on nuclear. It has been absolutely written in stone for many decades, and it will never be moving. We know that the quickest way to manage an energy transition is to look at the projects that are the most efficient to be built, the cheapest to be built – lowering people's power bills, not sending them through the roof, not sending them sky-high because of some ideology. It is about doing that and delivering it in a timely fashion and doing it whilst we are also reducing our emissions.

All of this is dog whistling. When they talk about nuclear being clean somehow – clean of what, toxic waste that stays in our environment for centuries, millennia? We know the record globally on the storage and maintenance of nuclear waste facilities leaves a lot to be desired. Can I just say also it is unforgiving – one mistake, and it is unforgiving. Victorians can be very confident they not going to get that from this side of Parliament and certainly not from any future Labor government in Victoria or indeed nationally. I commend this motion, and I look forward to the debate.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:15): It is clear that this motion is just another one of the government's sledge motions, a break-glass attempt by the government to divert from their own problems, and I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'the Allan Labor government be condemned for failing to provide secure, reliable and affordable energy to Victorians.'

We know why this motion is being moved, and that is because Labor's primary has hit 28 per cent and because at a federal level it has hit 29. So this government has decided, 'Why don't we help our Prime Minister, who is tanking, and our Premier, who is tanking?' And aren't they tanking? Victorians and Australians have lost trust in Labor, and why? One of the core reasons goes to the heart of this motion, because everybody in this state deserves reliable, secure, affordable energy, and they do not have it with this government that oversaw the worst blackout this state has ever seen – over half a million people without power. Every Victorian knows they would move a motion in this place to cover up their 28-point primary. That is what they do. They think, 'Oh, let's throw the dead cat over there; maybe everyone'll look at that.' Well, we all know what this is about. We have bills that could be debated – the budget, which the government is hiding from. I have said it all week – the government has spent so little time debating the budget. Of course they have, because they want to try and deflect from their problems.

We have got a cabinet that is split up. They have got different positions on everything, and the Deputy Premier, the stalking horse – he is a stalking horse that one. We all see that thoroughbred over there, we all see him – he is racing strongly at the moment, isn't he? Hasn't he had a week? He is standing up for a bit of common sense. 'I don't want to get rid of gas,' he says. Well, you have got a minister who will not approve any projects. The Minister for Energy and Resources will not approve any gas projects and then comes into this place and says, after 10 years, 'Oh, we don't have any more gas.' Well, you have not approved any projects, Minister. If you do not approve any projects, guess what happens, you run out of gas. That is what has happened in this state. Everybody knows it, and the minister has been exposed for it to the point that the Deputy Premier has called it out. I mean, how embarrassing that the Deputy Premier has had to call out the minister. Every time the minister for energy is asked about gas the minister gets up and says, 'Oh, we've run out of gas.' It is because you have not approved any projects, Minister – it is pretty simple. Victorians deserve to have reliable, secure and affordable energy. That is what they deserve, and when you vote Liberal, you will get it. That is the difference.

This motion is a joke. It is a cover-up for a 28-point primary. Everybody can see it. That is what this motion is about, but we can see and Victorians now can see how badly the government is failing at delivering for them. They do not have trust in this Premier, and this motion goes to one of the core reasons why Victorians have lost trust, because people do not have reliable, secure and affordable energy. Every member, if they were honest – which I will leave up to them – would stand up in this place and say that their constituencies are worried about power supply. They are worried about the

cost of energy provision. These are things that every single person will talk to you about, and they have got every right to feel that way. After 10 years we know this government has not delivered it for them.

To not approve any gas projects and then say, 'Oh my gosh, we're out of gas': can you believe the hypocrisy of it? We know why it was not approved: ideology, that is why. And the Deputy Premier has called it out. We know what the Deputy Premier is doing on this side of the chamber. We know the Deputy Premier is standing for common sense on gas. If only the Premier would hear his words, that great thoroughbred, the stalking horse that he is. That is why we have amended the motion to deal with the real substance of these issues. This should not be a debate about sledging. This should be a motion about the substance of ensuring that we have secure, reliable and affordable energy.

At the start of the year we saw one of the most embarrassing displays of an energy policy collapse this nation has ever seen. We saw the offshore wind policy of this government collapse in front of our very eyes. We had the Premier standing up to talk about offshore wind and not understanding basic details. We had the Minister for Energy standing up and not knowing basic details. We had the Minister for Environment, who took a little break out of his holiday, talking about this issue and not understanding the basic details. He said the details of the project were not available to the public when they were on a public website. You would think with all of his staff they would have the capacity to understand the basic details. The Premier said that the project had been approved by the state government despite the Minister for Planning doing something entirely different reviewing it. It was a mess. No wonder Victorians know they cannot have secure energy. Of course they cannot, because the Premier does not even understand the policy. The Minister for Energy is ideologically strangling gas. That is what the minister is doing, and everyone can see it. The minister has finally been exposed, because after saying that they are not going to approve any project, guess what happens, they run out. And now the minister comes into question time and says, 'Oh, if someone came and saw me, maybe I'd consider their approach.' Do you know what businesses are saying? 'Why would we bother with this minister?' That is what every single person in industry is telling us, and now they are starting to say it publicly. They are saying, 'Why would we go to this minister?' because this minister is not making value-based decisions; this minister is entirely ideological. We know it is true. This is a minister who started a process of locking up the entire parkland of much of Victoria. This minister is entirely ideological and has been exposed for it. That is what the substance of this motion is about.

What makes things worse is not just that the government has lost control of this policy area, the government has also cut the community out entirely from the process. They have created a new pathway for energy projects that entirely cuts the community from the process. It is so fundamentally wrong. Yesterday one of the members of this place came into the chamber and spent a number of contributions talking about the fact that I was recently at a rally at Lethbridge Airport, upset with me because I had met with her community. Well, of course I met with her community, because, guess what, the member has not. The member is absent. We have hundreds of people in that community asking a very, very simple and fair question: if you put windfarms 1 kilometre from the landing flight path of an airport where the emergency services vehicles land for the entire Geelong region, will it affect the capacity of those emergency services vehicles to land? That is a fair question. That is why hundreds of people are asking it, and they are getting no answer. So they have come to me and said, 'Why are we not getting an opportunity through the government's new processes to have a right to speak and to have our questions answered?'

What I find so offensive about the way that the communities are being cut out of not only energy but also planning more generally is that people move into communities – well, let us go even a step further: people create communities, people create towns, people create suburbs. They move into those areas. They look after those areas, and they form community groups. They care for these areas for years and for decades. Then the government comes along and says, 'I'm going to put something here and you don't get a say.' How is that right? How is that okay? What will happen later this year is the government will introduce draft laws which will entirely cut out communities for much of the planning

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process. That is what the government will do, and the community will turn on them. The community is going to turn in a way we have not seen before. You think a 28 per cent primary is bad – you wait and see.

If you cut the community out of all planning decisions and out of all energy decisions, what will happen is that the community will reject them, because the government is not some bunch of overlords. The minister cannot make a single decision, let alone doubling, tripling or quadrupling her workload every day. I mean, the minister cannot make any decisions. So if you give her more decisions, what is going to happen? The briefs are going to get taller. The dust on the briefs is going to get bigger. It is outrageous what the government is doing with energy, and cutting the community out of that process will bite them hard. And so it should. That is what is going to happen when these proposed laws come to Parliament later this year. You will see a groundswell from across the entire community, who will say, 'No more. We don't accept you building whatever you want wherever you want, because our community has character and community should be protected.' Community should be protected, and community having a say should be a core part of that.

We have moved an amendment to this motion, and the core of this amendment is about the failure of this government to provide secure, reliable and affordable energy. That is what we want to talk about, because that is the core of this issue. What the government has tried to do is bring up a break-glass political tactic in the form of a sledge motion. The Premier has been criticised for her speech last night at a pro-Israel function, the government has no capacity over policy day to day, the Deputy Premier is contradicting and the litany of errors is banking up. 'So what do we do? We're going to use a word over here to try and scare people.' The only way that works is if you have a Premier that people listen to, and, guess what, you do not. If you have a Premier that people actually trust and listen to, that tactic will work. But the tactic of the government now will not work, because the problems the community have are deep and they are real, and the cost-of-living impact on people is hurting them. People are worried about the fact that inflation rose this week and we may see another rate rise. That is the kind of stuff people are worried about.

For the government to, after 10 years, come along and throw some silly political sledge across the chamber to try and detract – it will not work, and neither should it. It is juvenile. It is university juvenile, what the government is doing at the moment, and the community can see it. That is why their primary is 28 per cent. People can see it. Unless the government actually get on to the priorities that people in this community care about, it will get worse for them. And so it should – they should be condemned for their behaviour. So for the minister to come in here and move some motion after crippling an industry – after destroying policy in this space – the minister should stand condemned. And the Premier, for trying to throw her dead cat politics over in the corner to try and trick Victorians away from the things they actually care about, should be condemned. The Premier should be condemned for her behaviour.

Victorians see it – that is why it is not working. Throw all the stupid university politics tactics you want, Premier, but you have been seen. Victorians see what you are doing, and they will call you out for it, and you will never, never get the standing that a Premier deserves while you behave in that way. Fix the problems that are there. Fix the things that people care about. Make sure people have energy. Make sure that cost-of-living issues are at the forefront of your agenda, not stupid university politics. That is what is happening, and that is why the amendment we have moved condemns the government for it and, in my view, condemns the Premier for it.

It is time that this behaviour gets called out – enough. It is time for the government to start talking about policies that matter and fixing problems that matter and not move things in this place that hurt people. Yesterday we debated a bill that is going to hurt 15,000 people. I did not see very many people on that side of the chamber get up and give a 10-minute defence of 15,000 people, did I? No – silence of course. Where is the party of the people? That was gone a long, long, long time ago, and it is sad. This motion is a disappointing reflection of what this government has become.

We will be debating the substance of what we should be debating, which is the core of my amendment, and we have a very long list of speakers that want to speak till the end of the day about it. Though I would love to spend the entire 30 minutes – I can assure you I would love to speak for the entire 30 minutes – we have a long list of people who want to get up and talk about the substance of this motion, about ensuring we have secure, reliable and affordable energy. So I will finish where I started and say: this is the Premier's dead cat sledge motion. That is what this is, and that is why we have amended it.

This is about the fact that the Premier has hit a 28 per cent primary – and all the members on that side of the chamber are very quiet. We know what they are thinking. We know they have lost confidence, like Victorians. How can you have trust and confidence in this Premier? The Premier has no standing – that is the issue – because the Premier is not focused on things that actually matter to people. The Premier is not focused on fixing problems that exist for people, and the Liberal–National parties are. That is the difference.

We are not going to be moved by some silly little motion. Every single sitting week the government can move a silly, little motion, and every week I will get up and I will point it out and every one of my members on this side of the chamber will do it too, because we are sick of the way the government uses this place – we are sick of it. The government needs to start doing things for people and fixing problems that they have.

Yesterday 15,000 people were hurt because of a bill, and every member who voted for that without standing up for those communities and who speaks for those communities without working to protect those communities should be condemned. That is what we are doing. That is what the Shadow Minister for Agriculture the member for Lowan is doing – working hard to try and do everything that we can to help 15,000 people. I know how hard the shadow minister is working to try and get a deal for these people. The government should be condemned for their failure on this policy and for the misuse of this place, and from now on, every time they do it they are going to be called out for it.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (15:34): I cannot believe that the opposition has been in opposition for 20 out of the last 24 years with such a rousing performance! They are the sorts of rousing performances that guarantee another 20 years. The member for Brighton spoke about breaking the glass. His response to energy prices is to support nuclear power, the most expensive. I would welcome the member for Brighton to stand up and say that he does not support nuclear power and that I am somehow misrepresenting him in this place. No, he is not going to get on his feet. Okay, we have got our answer. The member for Brighton is up on his feet all the time, but when invited to say that I am misrepresenting him when I say he supports nuclear power in this state, nuclear waste in this state –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, is this question time? I do not even know who that person is.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): That is not a point of order.

A member interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: Yes, indeed, it is a 'you' problem, it sounds like, from the member for Brighton.

Of course I rise in support of the Minister for Energy and Resources – no to nuclear and no to nuclear waste, no to higher power prices and bills, no to expensive, long bills and cost blowouts and no to small modular nuclear reactors, which do not or are unlikely to exist anytime soon. When will the member for Hawthorn stand up to Mr Dutton and his yellowcake cronies? When will the opposition in Victoria stand up? When invited moments ago, they did not stand up. They are choosing not to stand up for Victorians.

I could talk about all these matters, but I want to talk about some of the workers in the nuclear power industry in Japan, because there will be workers who will need to deal with a nuclear power industry

if it is set up. The nuclear power industry has an atrocious record. I am going to talk about 30 September 1999. The member for Brighton at that point was just continuing in his debating club, refreshing some of his early social media. In Tokaimura in Japan a 35-year-old, Hisashi Ouchi, Masato Shinohara and Yutaka Yokokawa were purifying uranium oxide to make fuel rods. They were at a very low risk, small facility, not like some of the big energy-producing nuclear power plants across Japan. On the morning they were not even wearing the regulation full protective clothing to undertake these tasks. Mr Ouchi was described as a handsome, powerfully built former high school rugby player with a wife and a young son. Mr Shinohara was married with three children. They were standing at a tank holding a funnel, pouring in a mixture of intermediate-enriched uranium oxide into steel buckets. Mr Yokokawa was in an adjacent room. A steel bucket and some funnels – these were the safety standards of a technologically advanced country with 40 years history in the nuclear industry. I do not think the member at the bench should talk down the technological ability of Japan; I would have thought that would be a mistake. The workers had no previous experience of handling uranium with that level of enrichment. They inadvertently had put in too much – seven times too much, in fact.

Clearly the prioritisation of profit over worker safety has been running rampant in the nuclear power industry. Clearly the profits over community safety were running rampant. As a result Mr Ouchi and his colleagues inadvertently triggered what is known in the nuclear industry as a criticality excursion. This is a phrase that may be entering *Hansard* for the first time. According to the Nuclear Energy Agency:

A criticality excursion (also referred to as a criticality accident) is the accidental production of a self-sustaining or divergent chain reaction of fissionable material.

In layman's terms, it is a nuclear accident. On this occasion it released as much radiation as the bomb dropped over Hiroshima, but without the accompanying explosion. Mr Ouchi said he saw a flash of blue light and passed out. He was the closest to the nuclear reaction and received what was probably the biggest exposure of radiation in the history of nuclear accidents. The processes, the safeguards to avoid this nuclear accident, a criticality excursion, were not taught and were not followed, and this was not the first time that it happened at this facility or other facilities like it.

These decades of investment in the nuclear industry had not protected those workers. It was profits over the protection of the workers and the citizens who lived in the area. These failings will no doubt be repeated in Australia should Peter Dutton and the Liberals and the Nationals across this country have their way. A year 2000 US Nuclear Regulatory Commission report noted that before Tokaimura, 21 previous criticality excursions had occurred between 1953 and 1997 in Japan.

There is some confusion now as to whether the workers were dragged from the room or they left the room themselves. Emergency workers who did arrive to support them received 4000 times the regular dose of radioactivity. The warnings of the community happened only for the first 350 metres. In the end those living a mile away were told to go inside. Children were playing at their schools. But the workers' fate was sealed; the damage had been done. Mr Ouchi was the closest to the reaction and received a massive dose of radiation – an estimated 17 sieverts of radiation or about 17,000 times the maximum annual permissible exposure level set by the government. The burst of neutrons and gamma rays from this criticality excursion was lethal but not immediately. The concentration of exposure was enormous. How do these high doses of radiation damage the body? It rendered Mr Ouchi unable to make new cells. His bone marrow stopped making the red blood cells that carry oxygen and the white blood cells that fight infection. His white blood cells basically dropped to zero. The exposure guaranteed the outcome, but just how much suffering would occur in the intervening 83 days was yet to be discovered.

The workers were first taken to the National Institute of Radiological Sciences in Chiba, just east of Tokyo. It was confirmed that their lymphatic blood count had dropped to almost zero. Their symptoms included nausea, dehydration and diarrhoea. Three days later they were transferred to the University of Tokyo Hospital, where doctors tried various measures in a desperate effort to save their lives. The

Japan Times said Mr Ouchi reportedly underwent the world's first transfusion of peripheral stem cells on 6 and 7 October. The doctors kept Mr Ouchi alive by pumping huge amounts of blood and fluids into him on a daily basis, treating him with drugs normally unavailable in Japan, indicating the high priority the government placed on his survival. He continued to deteriorate. A team of surgeons looked after him during this period.

At first his face was slightly red and swollen and his eyes were bloodshot, but he did not have blisters or burns. Within a few days his condition got worse. He began to require oxygen, his abdomen swelled and he continued downhill. Six days after the accident the only cells that doctors could see were scattered black dots, indicating that they were broken into pieces. He was unable to generate new cells. A week after the accident he received a peripheral blood stem cell transplant from his sister. He continued to deteriorate. When medical tape was removed from his chest his skin started to come off with it. He began developing blisters. It had killed his chromosomes. The pain became intense. Skin transplants were attempted to try and stop fluids escaping through the pores of his skin. He cried blood. He experienced breathing problems, and soon his heart stopped. He was resuscitated. His heart stopped again, and he was resuscitated again. For 70 minutes he lay dead. On 21 December his body finally gave out due to multiple organ failure.

Why should we not have a nuclear industry in Australia? That is why we should not. Because the care for workers will never exist in an industry that places profits at a premium. I did not talk about Fukushima. I did not talk about all the other accidents in this industry – accidents that are the result of deliberate profit-taking over the lives of community and workers. I commend this bill to the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:44): It is wonderful to be able to rise on the motion that is before the house today, which shows that yet again the Allan Labor government is so focused on continuing sky-high energy bills, and it is Victorians that consistently pay the price. I have never, ever seen any government right across Australia more focused on shutting down every single opportunity for energy supply in their own state than the Allan Labor government. When it comes to looking at all of the energy options, there is only one thing that this Labor government will support and that is renewables. We have got so many other resources we could be taking advantage of, but because Labor refuses to do so and continually bans different energy supplies, we simply have not got enough energy.

Unsurprisingly, Labor are pushing up power prices, and it is Victorians that are paying the price. We know, while we want to support renewables, you cannot just build them overnight. We need to have a grid to transmit the energy around. We need to build these things. We may need to make sure that farmers are actually supported and that we are not seeing our farmland replaced with renewables factories right across our state. We see already in Victoria that energy prices are going through the roof. That is what the first point of the minister's motion really goes to – Labor have failed to secure sufficient energy supply in Victoria, and as a result electricity prices have gone up by 25 per cent, gas prices have gone up by 27 per cent, there are Victorians who are struggling to put food on the table to feed their family and there are pensioners who cannot keep warm this winter because they cannot afford to heat their homes.

This is the state that we are in in Victoria because Labor have banned gas and they have shut down the coal industry. We have had huge losses of jobs, but I hear something different; I hear that behind the scenes the Minister for Energy and Resources is having secret discussions to see whether they can ramp that up again. So a much more intensive emitter of coal is okay, but we have got large-scale gas reserves in Victoria – not that the minister wants to agree that that has happened, even though her federal counterpart in her own party continually points out to her that there is sufficient conventional gas available around Victoria to be able to meet our gas supply needs if we tapped into that. If the minister would not mislead the Parliament and say that she has not ever been approached by a gas company to unlock more reserves here – we have seen them on the record today, gas companies, coming out and saying, 'Well, the minister might want to check her records, because we wrote to her. We said that we wanted to tap into Victoria's gas reserves. We said that we would help to boost the

supply to bring down gas prices in Victoria, to give cost-of-living relief to families in Victoria, to give cost-of-business relief to people who are trying to run a business in Victoria.’

Maybe even look at that energy supply from a bigger area if you are looking to support workers and make sure that we have not got this continual bleed of businesses out of Victoria to other states because it is cheaper to do business there because they can access cheaper energy and because they know that they have got a government that will support them and a government that will make sure that with the growth of their business it will put more money into the economy, which means more money into our roads and our hospitals – all of those things in our communities that make our lives better. But instead, Labor wants to make sure that we keep on pushing up energy prices and we keep on saying no to any other possible energy source apart from renewables.

The impact of this is significant, particularly for people in my electorate. In western Victoria it is now being seen as an opportunity to put so many wind farms and solar farms out there with no regard whatsoever for people who do not want to host these renewables factories on their farms. This is something that so many farmers right across the state are going to have to contend with, because it is the government’s own offshore wind policy directions paper which actually states that if we do not get offshore wind, we will lose 70 per cent of Victoria’s agricultural land. That means we will not be able to grow our own food. It means that you will harm the environment because you are going to have to have more food miles because you are going to have to import food to Victoria from interstate and from overseas.

That harms the environment more than actually supporting agriculture, which is a carbon sink. It helps to reduce our carbon emissions, which helps to lock them up, and most importantly, it helps to support our economy. Agriculture is such an important sector, and yet rather than listen to their own policy directions paper, do you know what the government have done – they have taken it offline. You cannot follow the link anymore to the policy directions paper because it was bad news for the government. They had a list of offshore wind projects which have been cancelled or not gone ahead, and the list is long. It clearly states in that document that if offshore wind cannot go ahead in Victoria, we will lose 70 per cent of Victoria’s productive agricultural land.

We know the list of offshore wind projects which are being canned is continuing to escalate in this bitter feud between the Victorian energy minister and her federal counterparts. If you look at the Port of Hastings, that was rejected because it would cause more harm to a significant wetland. It was banned; it could not happen. What other projects have we got? We have got the projects of course in Gippsland, the offshore wind projects. It was only revealed yesterday that Shell have pulled out of that project. They have pulled out of the offshore wind project off the coast of Gippsland because they did not have any sense of support from the government and felt that it is all talk and no action from Labor. Well, what a surprise. That has only been the case for 20 of the past 24 years, as I think was pointed out by the previous speaker.

We have also got a government which is willing to trade off important ecological benefits of our water environment. This is something the government is pushing for at the moment, around offshore wind in a whale migration route off the south-west coast. If this is what the government want to do, go ahead and just do renewables at any cost to the environment, at cost to rare species, at cost to our grasslands in regional areas, at cost to our whale migration paths and whale nurseries around the Bonney upwelling – that is what the government are doing – it is just ideology that is pushing this agenda.

Any responsible government should be looking at every opportunity for a variety of energy supplies. That does not mean that we have to build nuclear reactors right across Victoria. I think it is an eminently sensible discussion that the federal government are having about looking at different energy options to secure our energy future in Australia. But do you know where the most likely place would be? It of course would be South Australia. They have got large uranium reserves. They are building nuclear-fired submarines in South Australia. There are vast areas of land which are not occupied. It is a low population density. So the Labor government saying no to yet another energy source – ‘We’ll

never, ever do it' – is just naive. Our technology gets better and better. It can be a form of safe and reliable energy and provide ample supply.

I would encourage those opposite to do some research and learn more about nuclear, because it would not happen overnight either – there is no way. Even if the government were supportive of nuclear, they could not go ahead and build anything within the next 20 years. You are talking about something in the never-never, but it is today that we have not got enough gas supply. That is an easy way for this government to take pressure off the cost of living for every single Victorian, and I urge the government to do that. I urge the government, rather than blindly looking and trying to knock off every single energy source that is out there one by one, to make sure that they are looking at gas as an intervening supply of energy for our people. But we all know that Labor cannot manage Victoria's energy supply, and Victorians are paying the price.

I will not go into great detail about VNI West, but it has been an unmitigated disaster with the consultation with that community. We know that Labor want to completely ban community consultation for large-scale projects like VNI West. I condemn the government for their narrow thinking about energy and urge them to immediately address Victoria's cost-of-energy crisis.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:54): I am very happy today to stand here and support this motion condemning the federal opposition's nuclear power policy. But before I go into a bit of detail as to why, I just want to remind the house that the member for Brighton said that the Premier is not focused on the things that matter to people on the same day that the Premier announced a comprehensive package to stop violence against women. How out of touch, on this day, to say that the Premier is not focused on things important to people.

Those on the other side seem to be quite obsessed with gas, talking a lot about gas as an energy source that we need to keep using. The Grattan Institute has stated that it is no longer plentiful, it is no longer cheap and it is also a fossil fuel, so we need to look at alternatives. We know, though, that the federal opposition would like to see nuclear in this country. We know that nuclear power is extremely expensive and the possible environmental impacts are devastating, and we heard the member for Point Cook highlight one serious and really sad example of the impacts that nuclear has. Those opposite have been quite inconsistent on this issue, flip-flopping between suggesting that it would be part of the energy mix if they were to form government and refusing to say whether they will remove the nuclear ban in Victoria: 'We're sending it off to South Australia.' I am quite baffled at, I guess, the audacity, given that we know the history of nuclear testing in remote communities and the impact that that has had on First Nations people. So the suggestion that we perhaps consider South Australia as an opportunity is quite disappointing to hear.

It is very hard, but I will try to give nuclear power and those opposite the benefit of the doubt as much as possible, so I am talking the absolute best-case scenario for the timeline of establishing nuclear power plants in this country. The CSIRO's most recent energy cost report card suggested that it would take 16 years to build the first nuclear reactor in this country. Let us assume that we have shovels in the ground tomorrow – let us just think about that, ignoring the fact that it would require legislative changes, planning approvals, the funding for the reactor and much more – whilst also assuming that there is not a time blowout from the initial 16-year timeframe. And we know in other countries there have been significant time blowouts and also cost blowouts, so we are clearly making a lot of assumptions in support of nuclear. Even when we ignore a number of very important issues that would certainly come up if a reactor was to be built in this state, the absolute earliest that plant could be online is 2040, so it is a long way away. If the grand ambition of this policy is replacing coal-fired power plants with nuclear reactors, then what this means is more coal for longer. Maybe I should have brought in a piece of coal, perhaps, like a former Prime Minister from the opposition.

We know that Loy Yang A power station is scheduled to close by 2035. I am wondering if those opposite support keeping it open until 2040 or 2045 even. And what policies would those opposite implement to make sure that private companies cannot close their own coal-fired power plants if they

want to? I thought that they believed in the free market. The consequence of extending the life of coal-fired plants would be abandoning the state's incredibly ambitious 2035 and 2040 emissions targets, which have been massively endorsed by the Victorian public. To be honest, I would not be surprised at all if those opposite are really just using nuclear power as a way to keep coal around for longer.

I want to make note of the severe consequences that keeping coal-fired plants online for longer would bring. The world is already teetering on the edge when it comes to emissions targets and the increase in global temperature. A cap of 1.5 degrees or even 2 degrees of warming is becoming harder and harder for us to reach, and the actions that those opposite implicitly support and their federal counterparts explicitly support would amount to environmental vandalism and would only make it harder for the world to reach those targets, let alone this state or this country. We can certainly experience climate change at the moment. We have had – who would have thought at the end of May – 22 degrees.

Let us be very clear: if those opposite support nuclear power and the policies of their federal counterparts, the consequences of these reactors not being viable until the 2040s at the absolute earliest would mean that either we have no power or we have more dirty, expensive coal. This side of the chamber understands that lower power bills are a priority for households, and nuclear power clearly does not stack up when you compare it to cheap, clean renewable energy. The CSIRO's most recent GenCost report reaffirms that nuclear power is the most expensive form of power generation available; even dirty coal-fired power plants are cheaper than nuclear. It is clear that renewable energy is the cheapest form of energy generation available and it is the best pathway to our goal of zero by 2045, and that is even when you include the cost of firming wind and solar with batteries as well as new transmission. It is obvious to any serious party of government that this state should take advantage of areas where we have a natural advantage compared to other parts of the world. We have been gifted with the best renewable opportunities in this world, and it would be simply foolish for us to ignore this opportunity. Victoria has the lowest wholesale power prices in the national electricity market because of our investments in renewables. Why would we want to backtrack on that? It just does not make sense.

And all of this is before we even consider the cost of constructing a nuclear power plant. According to cost estimates from the CSIRO, constructing sufficient nuclear capacity – a 1600-megawatt capacity power station approximately the size of the decommissioned Hazelwood power station – would cost \$25.6 billion. It is an incredibly big estimate, but again I am trying my best to give the benefit of the doubt, because it could be bigger – we know in other countries it has been double that – if it even gets finished. The reality is that somebody is going to have to pay for that big amount, and whether those opposite would like to admit it or not, it might be with a nuclear tax. How do we pay for this? Someone has got to pay for it, whether that is in the form, maybe, of defunding public schools or maybe closing down hospitals. Who will fund this? What will happen?

To conclude my points, I have not had the chance to actually talk about other things, like if we put a nuclear reactor in Sandown, for example, in my electorate. We might have a meltdown in Sandown, and I certainly do not want a meltdown in Sandown, and neither do the residents of my electorate of Mulgrave. I might leave much of that there, but we have also got to think about consultation and what the community would say. What about First Nations people? What would they say? We need to ensure that local communities are on board with this hypothetical project. I would like to finish by reaffirming my support of this motion condemning the federal opposition's policy on nuclear.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:04): This motion that this lazy government has brought to the chamber this afternoon reflects the fact that all Victorians are being shut down, whether they are being shut down for talking about the budget or whether they are being shut down for talking about the closure of the forest industries, which we had yesterday when this government sought to shut it down. And now they want to make sure we do not have a proper debate and a proper conversation in the community about how we get affordable, reliable and deliverable energy into our homes. This

government has a one-track mind. When it gets a bee in its bonnet it does not want discussion, it does not want debate and it will use all the measures it possibly can to shut those debates down.

I know and the member for Lowan knows as well that across our region this government is happy to talk about renewable energy but it is never happy to talk about the costs and consequences of renewable energy. All energy has a cost. It is about mitigating those costs, and it is about mitigating the long-term negatives if they exist. We know what the negatives are on coal; we have been talking about that for a long time. We know what they are. This government is always quick to talk about the negatives on nuclear – well, we know what they are too. But there are negatives on renewables as well. It is about having fearless and frank conversations in the community and making the best decisions, because ultimately the community needs reliable, affordable, deliverable energy.

In a country like Australia, we are blessed; we have every type of energy at our fingertips. In readiness we can access it all. We can access and have accessed coal and gas. We have the ability to make new nuclear; in fact the rest of the world that uses nuclear relies on Australia to provide the raw materials for that. We have lots of sun. We have lots of wind. We have wave energy. We have it all, and yet this government continues to weaponise and bring down sensible long-term discussions about the best way to provide that energy to our people. It is foolish, it is wrong, it is misguided and worst of all it is going to affect the people the Labor Party says it stands up for the most – because who uses the most energy? It is not households, actually, it is industry and business. Energy – affordable, reliable energy – delivers jobs. It delivers value-adding. It delivers wealth and prosperity to Australia if we get it right. We are hearing too often, way too often, that so much of our industry has been lost because we do not prioritise affordable, reliable energy. Instead, when Labor is in charge they prioritise politicising and weaponising the most crucial element to a good First World productive economy.

We have to amend this crazy, waste-of-time motion that this lazy government has brought to the chamber this afternoon, absolutely. The only thing we should be debating is: how do we allow for secure, reliable and affordable energy? That is the debate to be had. We put the information out there; we discuss it. If I hear one more time from this lazy, unreliable government the argument that we cannot have nuclear because it takes too long to build – I ask all the Labor MPs sitting here: how long do you think it takes to build a renewable energy project? I ought to know; I have got enough of them. I have been in this place nearly 10 years. There are projects that were started or thought about before I entered this chamber that still have not seen the light of day. It takes decades. It takes years. It is crazy, and what is worse is this lazy government over here are perfectly happy to say, ‘We want another wind farm.’ You guys will build a wind farm and you have not even built the transmission line to take the power. We have had wind farms stand for three years before you have even been able to plug them into the grid. I mean, that is insane. It is all very well to build something, but it has got to be useful. It has got to be useful, and so does this debate. This debate needs to be useful, not political. It does not need to be weaponised.

Energy is the ability for people to have heat and for people to turn the lights on and the ability for businesses to manufacture and grow our local economy, particularly for regional Victorians. We pride ourselves on being able to value-add, whether it is the timber industry, whether it is the dairy industry or whether it is the grains industry. It does not matter what it is, we need to be able to value-add, and it requires energy. Energy cannot be delivered when the lights go out. What most Victorians – most thinking Victorians – now understand is that you cannot trust Labor to get it right on energy. They are failing Victorians.

We have got everybody known to man who produces reports on this stuff – whether it is the Australian Energy Market Operator, whether it is the Productivity Commission; it does not matter who it is – all giving warnings loud and clear: this government is not planning properly for energy and energy use. Instead today this lazy government refuses to have a debate about the budget. You refuse to let Victorians know what you are doing with the billions and billions you are ripping out of the pockets of hardworking Victorians and where you are spending it. We found out yesterday you have got slush funds buried under the Treasurer’s seat. You are happy to do that, but you are not happy to debate it.

MOTIONS

Thursday 30 May 2024

Legislative Assembly

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So to think that you have turned up here today with a fanciful notion that you are going to put a nuclear power plant on the Great Ocean Road would have to be the most childish, university-student load of garbage that has been presented as a motion in this chamber for a very long time. You know it is not true. You know it is fanciful. It just shows the level of debate you cretins are prepared to lower yourselves to when you cannot have a sensible discussion. Because a sensible discussion needs to be about 'How do you generate it? How do you transmit it? And how do you keep the price down?' They are the only things that matter. What matters then is which one is the best long-term choice for Victorians. You guys do not understand that. You are obsessed with your transition to electricity, and you are hell-bent on forcing the price of energy up for the people who can least afford it.

We heard yesterday that you could not even maintain a sensible debate on the shutting down of Victorian forests. You refused to. You had to gag us all because you would not entertain the debate that 15,000 families will become unemployed as of next month because of your deliberate policies that are anti regional Victoria.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): Through the Chair.

Richard RIORDAN: Yes, Acting Speaker, I am happy to send it all through you, because quite honestly it is clearly a waste of breath on those opposite, because they are not listening. They are not listening to the experts and they are not listening to the industry. They are not listening to those that generate power, who will tell them – if any of you wanted to actually –

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): Through the Chair.

Richard RIORDAN: If – through you – they were to approach anyone who actually generates electricity, they would understand that we are in a parlous state. And to think that you are wasting the time of this Parliament on some schoolchild motion that makes no sense and is irrelevant to the needs of Victorians – that is what is wrong with the state of Victoria. You will not talk about your debt. You will not talk about your mismanagement. Heavens above, you will not even talk about the behaviour of two of your colleagues. In a week when you have made so much –

Vicki Ward: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it would appear that the member is ignoring your ruling to speak through the Chair. I recognise the passion with which he may defend not having a nuclear power facility in Anglesea, but I would ask that he refer his comments directly to the Chair.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I ask you to direct your comments through the Chair.

Richard RIORDAN: To continue, directly through you, Chair, I do note with great interest that, despite all the very solid arguments I put forward, it is only when I mention the behaviour of some of your former colleagues that the minister at the table, the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, decides to stand on her feet. I guess it is like so many of the debates here that this government is very quick to shut down. They are also very quick to shut down about how they are dealing gendered violence and inappropriate behaviours.

Anyway, I digress and will move back to the motion of the day. The motion of course is about the need to amend this silly motion that has been put to the house today. It is with great passion that I say to this government, on behalf of the constituents of Polwarth, that an economy like the one that we have that is so vibrant in western Victoria relies on the value-add of many billions of dollars of agricultural and regional product. It cannot be done with the inferior, second-rate, Third World energy system that this government is hell-bent on bequeathing to Victorians. So I fully support our amendment put forward today. Let us not talk about imaginary, fanciful problems that do not exist. Let us talk about the problem that does exist. The problem that exists is that Victoria is rapidly running out of reliable, deliverable, affordable energy that is absolutely critical and vital to the prosperity of Victoria.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (16:14): I rise to support the motion by the Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources and, wonderfully, Minister for the

State Electricity Commission. In 2024, in a country like Australia with abundant sunshine, wind and waves, I cannot understand why on earth the Libs would be pushing for nuclear power. What insanity. Before anyone on that side stands up – before the next person stands up – go in your office, because you do not probably do not do much else, and watch *Chernobyl*. You can still watch it on Binge. It is worth seeing, and you really should watch it before you stand up and speak.

Before you get in behind the potato in Canberra or continue with the right-wing division of the carrot in the US, have a good think about the legacy you might want to leave behind. Think about Fukushima, think about all the private companies that you have handed assets to over the years who inevitably cut corners on maintenance and safety, think about what would stop them doing exactly that again and think about how devastating this would be in the case of nuclear. There is no room for error. Mistakes end in deaths, often thousands and thousands of them, and effects that poison our environment for millennia. Any mistake is deadly, and with natural emergencies increasing, how on earth would we feel assured that a nuclear plant could withstand what nature is capable of these days? Apparently in France the residents surrounding reactors are given iodine tablets for those just-in-case scenarios. Imagine having to have them next to the children's Panadol and the bandaids.

I know quite a lot of older people who have voted Liberal much of their lives, but these latest ideas must make them shake their heads. I know it is not a grievance debate today, but I really do grieve for those old Liberal voters, who once had halfway respectable people to vote for. You are not even attracting the young voters. They are turning away in droves, and I do feel sorry for them all. They must be feeling so disillusioned and left behind and ashamed.

The Libs and Nats getting behind nuclear should be ashamed of themselves. Bringing in nuclear makes just about as much sense as bringing back thalidomide. And where would the reactors go? Where would the waste go? I am sure it would not be Brighton or Boroondara, although I can think of another suburb starting with B whose people often pay the price for crazy ideologies and privatisation from that side.

My daughter is currently planning her year 12 subjects and thinking of engineering. Looking through the uni intake courses with her last night, there are such an abundance of opportunities in safe renewable energy, and Australia and Victoria are leading the way. Pardon the pun, but renewable energy really is a sunshine industry. Unlike poor old Homer stuck in Springfield, there is no way any of us would want our children working at a nuclear power plant.

Our beautiful country has a natural abundance of sunshine, waves, water and wind, perfectly demonstrated today by the windy conditions just outside the doors of this place. All of these things are a perfect recipe for cheap renewable energy, yet the drongos in the Liberal Party want to invest in nuclear. With our country in the grips of a cost-of-living crisis –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think you have let this go on long enough. Could you ask the member to come back to the motion, please?

Vicki Ward: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I take on board what the member has raised, but I also reflect that the previous speaker referred to people in this chamber as cretins. So I do ask that the debate be elevated to a level that is respectful of everybody.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): On the point of order, I bring the member back to the motion before the house.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD: Maybe I will just pre-emptively apologise for calling you all drongos. I just wanted to get that in. Sorry, I do apologise.

With our country in the grips of a cost-of-living crisis the Labor government is doing all it can to reduce the cost of energy bills to our community and doing it in a way that is sustainable and healthy. The Solar Homes package offers substantial rebates towards the cost of installing either solar panels or solar hot-water systems, reducing both household bills and greenhouse emissions. Those who have

accessed the program already have been saving an average of \$1073 per year. The Victorian budget 2024–25 will invest another \$37.7 million to deliver 35,000 rebates for energy-efficient electric hot-water systems and a further \$6 million for interest-free loans on solar battery and storage systems – and it does not take long for them to pay back themselves. This builds on the more than \$624 million in rebates we have delivered since 2018, which has seen more than 257,000 rooftop solar systems installed on Victorian homes, generating a total of 1.7 gigawatts of power.

I was lucky enough to be an early adopter of solar with the Rudd baby bonus many, many years ago, and we were able to put solar panels on our house and also get the 66-cent rebate. We also had at the time the Moreland Energy Foundation, which was a really great organisation that did a really good job, and I thank Mike Hill and all the visionary people who set that up. They gave us free advice on things like double glazing, insulation and shading, and since then my husband and I, with the money we have been able to save on energy because we have solar panels, have been able to put in heat pumps, go fully electric in the kitchen and do lots of things as we go. We have been lucky enough to do that, and I thank Rudd for giving us that opportunity many years ago.

We are also investing \$42 million to install 100 neighbourhood batteries in Victoria, and the member for Pascoe Vale and I are lucky enough to get two of these locally, one in Hume and one in Merri-bek. I can share that with the member for Greenvale, who is also happy with the one in Hume. This investment will support up to 25,000 homes in having access to renewable energy that brings down the energy prices for Victorians. In the year to date 36 per cent of our energy has come from renewables. I will repeat that: 36 per cent of our energy comes from renewables – more than three times the lowly 10 per cent we inherited in 2014.

Victoria already has the lowest wholesale prices in the national electricity market due to our record investment in renewable energy over the past eight years. The newest Victorian default offer is \$100 lower than the last one. Why would we want to throw all that away to build overpriced and dangerous nuclear plants, not to mention the time it would take before a single kilowatt of energy is produced? The CSIRO's most recent *GenCost 2023–24* report again confirms that nuclear is the most expensive form of power generation available. According to the cost estimates from the CSIRO, constructing sufficient nuclear capacity for a 1600-megawatt capacity power station approximately the size of the decommissioned Hazelwood power station would cost \$25.6 billion.

We need to learn from the experience of the nuclear leaders like France and the UK. The UK is currently building a new 3260-megawatt plant in Somerset. The initial estimate for the construction in 2016 was \$30 billion. This has now blown out to more than double that, at \$61.2 billion. Along with the cost blowouts, Somerset started construction in 2016 and still is not anywhere near being finished. The latest estimate is that it will be ready in 2027 – 11 years and growing before the energy is available. Yet we can stick our solar panels in the sun immediately for a private residence or build a major project within one to three years; it is just not even comparable. A new plant in Flamanville in France was originally expected to be completed in 2012. Ten years later it still is not producing electricity. These plants are being built in countries that have maintained a continuous build program over an extended period that reduces costs through economies of scale and learning-curve improvements in construction. It also makes it easier to provide skilled labour, as there is a career path for workers.

None of these things are true in Australia. The coalition are proposing to build maybe a handful of reactors, so there is no scale, no existing workforce in the industry and little incentive to move into the industry in the first place. As I said before, who would really want to work in it? I would not want my kids anywhere near it. If countries with a continuous build program have such significant time and cost overruns, we can only expect to see diabolical blowouts here. A 2024 Reuters article noted that France's nuclear reactor fleet has faced a swathe of output issues since 2022, including extended maintenance issues at its aged reactor fleet.

The irony is that while the Libs want to follow suit and open Victoria up to nuclear energy, French power firms have been growing volumes of renewable energy in recent years to supplement the slump

in production from their out-of-commission plants. In 2023 French output from solar and wind farms increased by 18 per cent and 26 per cent respectively from the year before to record highs. Output from hydro plants also increased sharply in 2023, by 17 per cent from 2022 levels, which helped push the country's total clean electricity generation to the highest since 2021 and account for a record 24.3 per cent share of the total electricity output.

It seems that nuclear energy production is being replaced by renewables everywhere you look, so why would we want to go backwards? Victorians do not want nuclear reactors and waste in their backyards. I know I do not. I want my children and my children's children to grow and not have to worry about fallout from a reactor or waste and pollutants from uranium mining.

Professor Ian Lowe's submission to the 2019 inquiry into the prerequisites for nuclear energy in Australia noted:

All thermal power generation requires large volumes of cooling water. This is proving a serious limitation overseas; nuclear power stations in France have been forced to cease operating in recent summers because water cooling has not been available in the quantities required.

Any proposal to build nuclear power stations in Australia would be ridiculous.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (16:25): I rise today to talk on this motion. From the very start when the minister got up and moved the motion I think the fourth or fifth point out of her mouth was that nuclear power is virtually illegal in Victoria. I think she blows up her own argument for moving this motion. There is a moratorium on nuclear power in Australia and in the state. It is interesting to be able to stand up and talk and listen to other members in the chamber give their synopsis of what is going on. I am not sure there are too many other members in the chamber that have power stations in their seat, like I do. No matter what the change, coal-fired power stations are going to stop. We know that Yallourn is going to come off in 2028 and Loy Yang is going to finish producing energy in 2035.

The issue that we have is we need to have a move or a transition into another form of power. The government have put all their eggs in the renewables sector. We welcome renewable power, but there is just more than talking about wind blowing and sun shining on solar panels which I think we have got to get our head around. We have got transmission lines that need to be built right across the state of Victoria that can connect this offshore wind power and the solar farms into the grid so we can supply power. At the moment, as we stand in the chamber, the lights are shining, the microphones are working and Hansard are going, 'Thank goodness we've got coal-fired power stations, because the transmission and broadcast is still going.' We need to make sure that we have got a timeline that will work to make sure that we can transition out of coal-fired power stations and into our renewable assets.

Whatever it is that we have, whether it be wind or solar, the government continually starts to bring up the conversation about nuclear on Labor's side. I do not think that we have actually spoken about it on our side too often in the chamber, but I have noticed in the last six or so weeks we have been down here that nearly every single person that stands up on Labor's side is starting to talk about how our side of the chamber are going down that path of nuclear. It concerns me a little bit. If they are starting to bring that up, is that a conversation that obviously they do want brought into the chamber? But they do not want to be seen to be wanting to have that talk.

We have actually seen, with the member for Hastings, that the port has been canned down his end of the state. We have got no offshore wind being built. We have got no solar panels or solar farms; we do have some being built. Is it that people are starting to wake up that the timeline is wrong, we are going to run out of power and we are going to suffer blackouts? Is it the backup plan of the government to start just easing the conversation in about nuclear as to where we go? People around Victoria and the people that are advising the minister are doing their sums and thinking, 'Hang on a minute, we're in a little bit of trouble. We're not going to be able to bring all these renewables on line and build our towers, which are each going to be as big as the Rialto building.' Each tower is as big as the Rialto building – that is how big they are – so they do not go up in half a day.

To be able to have enough renewable energy to make sure the state keeps the lights on we have got to cover 70 per cent of our countryside with solar panels to make it work. The flip side of that is: how do we get enough food for the people of Victoria to eat? We are going to be importing our food. There has got to be a little bit of work done to say: do we want to eat, or do we want to have renewable power? The way forward is going to be one that needs timing. Yes, we are going to go to renewables, but why does it have to be done by 2030 and 2035?

I speak with the power stations down in the Latrobe Valley, and – they do not say this; it is just my synopsis from listening to the government and talking with people that work in the power industries – I do not think they are going to be shutting in 2028 and 2035. I think they have got the heads-up from the minister: ‘We might have made a little bit of a mistake on our timeline, and we need to keep you open,’ to the point where one of the power stations there might have called the bluff of the government, and the government is apparently subsidising one of the power generators down there heavily. I would like to know where this can be found in the budget. It might be a question that I could ask the Treasurer or actually ask the Minister for the State Electricity Commission: how much is it costing Victoria at the moment to keep the power stations open? The workers there are doing a great job. We have talked to them – that is what they want to do; they want to keep the lights on for us. We just need to have a proper timeline and a proper conversation about what we are going to do.

Why are we hearing this stuff around the state? And it is not just coming from my half. It is because the people are starting to wake up to what is coming out from the government and in particular the minister when she is talking about our power prices and our gas prices going down – well, there is nothing further from the truth. If you open up your bill that you get online or, as I know a lot of the pensioners in my neck of the woods do, you are opening it up out of the mail, you will see that they are going up. The cost-of-living crisis and the actual amount of pressure it is putting on these people to be able to continue to move forward is really disappointing.

Now I will talk about the transmission lines and the wind turbines and the solar farms. It is fine that they come on, but it is not as if they are going to be ready and able to be used by 2028 when Yallourn shuts. So we are going to be ripping out 20 per cent of our state’s energy, and we are not going to be replacing it with a lot. I hear from other members too about how they are having batteries put in around the state. Well, it is great to have the batteries, but we have got to be able to charge the batteries so you can use the energy. If we have not got the energy to be able to charge the batteries to make sure that we have this new source of power, we need to do our homework.

We talk about nuclear energy, and it would be remiss of me as we move forward not to do my own homework on what it means to have nuclear energy and how it works. I do not think you need to be Einstein in the chamber to know that if at some stage nuclear energy does arrive in Australia, they are going to be putting it probably where the power stations are now, because that is where all the infrastructure is. So I need to do due diligence and have conversations and see how it is going to work, because I am not going to be putting the people in my community at any risk at all – none whatsoever. We need to have proper conversations to make sure of what the mix is going to be. And nuclear power is in the future, if it ever does arrive here. At the moment we cannot have it. But we need to be able to go out and do the work to make sure we know what is going on.

When we do have serious problems in the state, like with our power supply and our power sources, we need serious people in charge, and at the moment the biggest problem the minister has is that she has lost the people. Every time she gets up to speak about renewables and shutting the energy market down she loses the people. They are not going along with her at the moment. She stands up and talks in the chamber and she comes down at stages and talks in the Latrobe Valley, but I think everyone is thinking, ‘What is going on?’ We have seen at the moment that the people are just losing faith in the government. To the minister: people just want to know what the truth is. What is our make-up? What is our proper timeline? How much is it going to cost to get these renewables up and going? The minister cannot tell us the truth about these things. In closing, with a couple seconds to go: be up-front with us and tell us our timeline, because at the moment we are not hearing enough.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:35): I rise with conviction and sincerity to condemn the federal opposition's plan to send energy bills sky-high with dangerous and expensive nuclear power and to call on the Victorian Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Opposition to rule out nuclear reactors on the Great Ocean Road or in any Victorian community. There is sincerity in this motion. I know that those opposite have cast some aspersions our way, but I am concerned. I am concerned that we are actually in 2024 debating in Australia the prospect of nuclear power. We have a federal Leader of the Opposition openly discussing this and entertaining this as a potential. We have never used nuclear power in Australia, and I have always considered that a very good thing. I lived in the UK and I drove past nuclear reactors, and I can tell you I always felt a sense of unease, because when something goes wrong – and admittedly it does not always, but when it does, it goes horribly, terribly wrong. And the ramifications cover great space and time because it hangs around. We only need to look at Chernobyl as a prime example of that, amongst others.

There are moments in time which are imprinted in the collective consciousness of people – those who have borne witness or those who bear witness afterward through watching the footage and hearing the stories. It is intergenerational. The moment when the United States dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the moment when the nuclear reactor in Chernobyl melted down; the tsunami which destroyed the nuclear reactor in Fukushima, where they are still dealing with radioactive wastewater being released into the oceans – all of these moments are part of our collective memories. And why? It is because, as I just said, the sheer scale of the devastation is untold, and it transcends time. Unfortunately it goes well beyond the barriers. If it gets into the waterways, that nuclear radioactive material travels, and its impacts are widespread.

I was looking at the ocean currents around Japan and the wastewater being released there through the Fukushima power plant. It is quite terrifying if you are on the west coast of the US or Canada because it is coming your way as well if you look at ocean currents. I do not think those opposite and their counterparts in the federal Parliament quite understand the significance of what can go wrong when there is a nuclear meltdown. To hear the member for Point Cook's contribution beforehand, it was not even a meltdown which occurred, but we heard of a terrible, terrible nuclear industrial accident – catastrophe, one could say – and I have to say I felt it viscerally. I was wincing at the descriptions of how that poor man died a slow, painful, torturous death as a result of exposure to uranium. It was horrific. For anyone who did not hear that, it is not for the faint-hearted, but it is worth apprising yourself of the information and reading *Hansard* just to really get an understanding of why those of us on this side of the chamber have deeply held concerns about this.

The other part of this too is that I am a bit puzzled. I am baffled, one could say. When we have renewable energy now supplying 39 per cent of Victoria's power, why would the opposition even entertain the notion that the alternative to coal is to find something more dangerous, dirty in terms of the uranium waste by-products and hideously expensive? When we hear cries of 'Oh, the cost', believe me, I know my power bills are not cheap anymore, but they are cheaper than if I were in New South Wales. They are cheaper than if I were anywhere else on the east coast of Australia because of our investment in renewables. That is a fact that those opposite sometimes find a little bit inconvenient to deal with. I cannot understand, then, why nuclear. The whole prospect of it and the length of time it would take to build –

Jess Wilson: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Daniela DE MARTINO: What a shame the clock ran down, because, clearly, I have too many inconvenient truths to share. I did notice the exodus that was occurring on that side, and I felt it in my waters. I am glad they were not radioactive waters. I would like to state – and I think that those opposite and everyone in the chamber should listen to this list because this is a frightening list – I did some research because I do like facts, and I read that the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission actually talks about emergency procedures in the event of a power plant meltdown. They have two

areas which they denote to be general propositions for managing a fallout at a reactor. One is a 10-mile radius, which translates to 16 kilometres. They call that the plume exposure pathway. It is exposure to and inhalation of airborne radioactive particles. The next radius is 50 miles, and that is 80 kilometres. That is called the ingestion pathway and is where you have to be concerned about the food and the liquid you ingest because it has been contaminated.

I would like to read out some of the areas around Anglesea within the 80-kilometre ingestion pathway, and bear in mind that this is in still conditions without a wind factor. If we have a look at Anglesea, it goes all the way to Mornington Peninsula, Sorrento, Portsea and all the way out to Mount Martha. It goes as far as Laverton, I am sorry to say to the member for Laverton – I am sorry to say all these lists – and Altona Meadows. It goes just south of Buninyong and Bungal and it includes Colac. I dare say that the member for Polwarth may be quite intrigued to know that his area, which I know he is incredibly proud of, would be in the ingestion pathway if there was a nuclear reactor placed in Anglesea that had a meltdown.

We will look at the Latrobe Valley because we did just hear from the member for Morwell and I am not sure if he understands either that 80 kilometres from Loy Yang, if that happened to be where they decided to drop a reactor, includes Leongatha, Korumburra and Outtrim. It goes to Warragul, Drouin, Lake Wellington and Sale. It goes down to Wilsons Promontory. That is in still conditions with no wind factor, and heaven help us all if the wind is blowing in the wrong direction. That is easily searchable by anyone in this chamber if you look at a radius map. It is quite concerning when you see it, because when you look at what they have to do in order to be able to have a nuclear plant, they have to entertain the notion that things go horribly, terribly wrong.

I actually knew a PhD graduate, a doctor I went to university with, and he had a degree in nuclear science. I was quite surprised because, to be quite honest, he was a bit of a hippie. The reason why he had a degree in it was that his job was to decommission nuclear reactors. Do you know what happens in an evacuation situation? You know we are told here that if there is a fire – and we all had a fire evacuation the other sitting week – we need to walk calmly and slowly out of the building and go to our appointed places. When there is a nuclear reactor fallout, if someone falls down, you do not stop to help them. You are instructed to jump over them, and you go and you keep going. You wait for nothing, you wait for no-one and you keep moving because every nanosecond counts. That is what we are talking about, because even though the probability may not be overly high, there is always the possibility. It only takes one terrible disaster and thousands and thousands and thousands of people will be affected, not just at that time but ongoing. The effect it will have I do not even want to think about. So I support this motion wholeheartedly.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (16:45): Here we are this afternoon on a Thursday talking about a hypothetical issue that the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is using to waste our time, debating this hypothetical issue in the never-never – a possible energy issue that is great to talk about when we have a present energy issue at hand here and now. Wow, would you believe it, here we are talking about this hypothetical never-never issue when we had an issue this very year that saw half a million Victorians plummeted into blackouts thanks to the government's inability to manage energy. It is a crisis the minister for energy is not equipped to handle – we all agree here on this side. According to the *Financial Review*:

Victorian Energy Minister conceded Lily D'Ambrosio conceded on Thursday that the state needed new gas supplies, after previously undisclosed documents revealed that her department had warned the Labor government last year that shortfalls were looming.

Minister D'Ambrosio ... told a parliamentary hearing that no onshore gas explosion permits had been granted in Victoria since Labor came to power in 2014.

MOTIONS

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Legislative Assembly

Thursday 30 May 2024

Not one. So maybe there is no gas because no permits have been issued or approved. Then recently on 3AW the minister said this:

Right now there are nine licences for exploration for gas in Victoria. Nothing is stopping any of those finding gas. The fact is they're not finding the gas. And the reason for that is because of geology ...

Minister, the reason that Victoria does not have gas is not geology, it is your ideology in fact. But let us hear from the experts – wait for it, the experts. Australian Energy Producers Victoria director Peter Kos has rubbished this claim, saying that Minister D'Ambrosio's idea that Victoria's gas reserves are running low is wrong, saying instead that Victoria 'has abundant onshore gas reserves'. Peter went on to say:

But the political will is missing and new developments that can put downward pressure on prices and avoid blackouts –

like we saw earlier this year –

will not proceed unless the government provides a stable regulatory environment to allow investment.

There we have it. He pointed to the minister's own Victorian gas program, which found that there is up to 830 petajoules, about four years worth, of conventional onshore gas. There you have it. That gas study, he also went on to say:

... did not consider unconventional gas and the state has not been explored as much as it should have given the state's long-running anti-gas policies and bans.

There you have it. Minister D'Ambrosio's gas-phobic, unscientific and wrongheaded – experts are saying that it is wrong – approach towards energy will leave our most vulnerable Victorians to freeze this winter as costs go up and up and up. According to the AFR:

Southern states led by Victoria face a gas shortfall this winter which will make them reliant on supply piped from Queensland and the Northern Territory to keep the heating on.

That is what the Labor government has done to this state over the past 10 years. That is what the minister for energy has done to our state: transformed us from independent to dependent, a state begging other states for just crumbs of energy.

In the spirit of bipartisanship, I will quote a senior member of federal Labor, who said this about Minister D'Ambrosio:

... on gas, it's always someone else's fault.

I could not have said it better myself. The minister's opening speech made it seem like she can sometimes be a little bit nasty, but you know sometimes the minister occasionally can give a compliment. How is this: when the federal energy minister Madeleine King got up to provide some sort of reasonable policy – your own federal Labor energy minister – she said that she would not ban all gas exploration in Australia. What did Minister D'Ambrosio say to her federal colleague? She said Madeleine King is more like 'a coalition minister'. There you have it – what a compliment. That is fantastic.

With an energy minister this sheltered from the realities of the energy landscape, it is no wonder we have more and more Victorians seeking energy bill assistance under Labor. Recent figures reveal the number of Victorians seeking assistance to help pay their gas and electricity bills, and this has risen more than 40 per cent compared to the previous summer. The facts and the figures are here. The energy ombudsman has also highlighted the significant rise in gas bills despite households cutting their usage. This comes as the Australian Energy Market Operator, or AEMO, in its latest *Gas Statement of Opportunities* warned that gas demand could outstrip supply in Victoria and other south-eastern states on days of extreme weather as soon as the middle of next year. The new figures also follow a recent St Vincent de Paul Society report finding that Victorians have paid 22 per cent more for gas and 28 per cent more for electricity over the past year. I was in the chamber when the minister proudly talked

about prices going ‘down, down, prices are down’ and using this catchcry, when figures show that they are actually up. They are going up – 22 per cent more is what Victorians have been paying for gas, and 28 per cent more is what they have been paying for electricity over the past year. That is absolutely tragic.

This is having a significant impact not just on the energy market but on the job market as Labor’s energy mismanagement is driving local jobs here in Victoria interstate. Recently Seeley International announced it would close its Albury–Wodonga facility by 2025 and consolidate operations in Adelaide – why? – citing the Allan Labor government’s hostile gas, energy and business policies. Seeley’s decision came a day after the South Australian Labor Premier – so it seems like you are at odds with all of your federal and your state counterparts – Peter Malinauskas criticised the Victorian government’s energy policies, confirming that gas has a role to play, there you have it, in the transition to net zero. To quote the Shadow Minister for Energy, Affordability and Security in the other place:

Lily D’Ambrosio’s failed gas policy is costing jobs and the Seeley closure in Albury–Wodonga is the latest devastating instalment and a body blow to manufacturing.

Wow, how is that! While the horrors of daily mass blackouts under Labor are yet to come, I assure you they will if they win again. But who could forget the mass blackouts in February, which left, as I said, half a million Victorian homes and businesses without power.

As we all know, the government have found no money to rebuild a gas industry in Victoria, but what they have found is a \$75.7 billion pre-election slush fund. That is what the recent state budget has revealed. Victorians, hear this loud and clear: there is not enough money to pay down this debt, which is higher than in New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. We have to pay \$25 million in interest repayments every single day, not with the government’s money but with taxpayers money – your money. Not only do we not have that, but what we do have is a \$75.7 billion slush fund – a credit card that the Treasurer can keep swiping here and there and using for his pet projects and pork-barrelling and this, that and the other so that he can continue to have jobs for mates and continue to just waste taxpayers money day in, day out. You deserve better, Victoria. Warrandyte deserves better.

In my final minute, we know this: the government has allocated \$38.5 billion for future programs –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member knows full well that she should not be reflecting on you in the chair and that the use of the word ‘you’ in her contribution is entirely inappropriate. I ask that you ask her to respect the forms of the house and to speak directly to the motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): I am ready to rule on the point of order. Could the member talk through the Chair, please. I bring her back to the motion.

Nicole WERNER: I appreciate that, Acting Speaker. I am actually nine months elected, so I am still learning these things. In fact I note that ministers on that side of the house still use ‘you’ and also reflect on the Chair – and they use ‘you’re’ and call us drongos – yet that does not seem to be an issue on that side of the house, but there you go. Victoria, you deserve better than this Labor government, which cannot manage money.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (16:55): Wow. Okay; let us bring it back to some facts. I rise to speak on this motion. It is a pleasure to speak on this motion. I have been looking forward to adding to the contributions today. I am going to firstly go to the new CSIRO GenCost report and just talk a little bit about that. That GenCost report has been published annually since 2018. That gives us a really good indication about the forms of energy that we may see in this country. Not the last one that we have seen but the one before that talked about nuclear energy as being the most expensive form of power generation available. Again in this latest one we see that nuclear just does not stack up, so we have had two reports that say that by our CSIRO. It is just incredible that we are getting into this debate when we have a cost-of-living crisis – that a coalition federal opposition and this opposition are talking about nuclear energy for Victoria where we would be giving households more expensive power. It is

absolutely incredible to think that we would not be investing into our wind and solar resources, which we know produce cheaper electricity and cheaper power. And why wouldn't we want to make that investment into renewables when we also know it would create thousands of jobs?

I would just like to talk a little bit, with the time I have got left, about where we would put this nuclear power plant or the waste. If opposition came to government in the next little while, they would have to firstly remove the restrictions that we have, and then they would have to work out the location. Let us be up-front with the community now then about where you would put those nuclear power plants here in Victoria. It is an absolutely ludicrous idea, but it also goes to a social licence here in Victoria. I do not believe the Bellarine would indeed give a social licence for nuclear power in their electorate.

It kind of reminds me of another discussion that we have had in this state which I am very passionate about, which was about fracking. There was no social licence in Victoria to do gas extraction using the fracking technique. Interestingly, in the inquiry into unconventional gas, or fracking, when our government ultimately banned fracking in Victoria, we listened to the science and the community, and there was clearly no social licence from the community. But in that final report the coalition decided to do a minority report where they, one, did not call for a ban on fracking. But also in their report they did not use the word 'community' once. I have scanned that minority report many times, and the word 'community' is not in their minority report. I think that goes to the arrogance of that side of the house, really, to not even mention the word 'community' and the dangers of fracking. So I challenge them to be up-front with the community now on where they would put nuclear energy in Victoria.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, there is only one political party in this state that has issued fracking licences.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Alison MARCHANT: It is interesting that the conversation has very much gone to gas in this debate when we have had questions in question time and we have had debate in here about gas. I sat on the advisory panel, with the chief scientist Amanda Caples, as a community representative – something which actually talked to the availability of onshore gas in Victoria – and it beggars belief that we continue to have this argument or this debate when the chief scientist is telling us the advice and the evidence is there in writing. The minister has been nothing but clear with the Victorian public about our gas situation.

The SPEAKER: Order! The time set down for consideration of the remaining items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

Bills

Sustainable Forests (Timber) Repeal Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Emma Kealy's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until fair compensation for loss of income is received by all those impacted by the Labor government's early closure of the sustainable native timber industry.'

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Lowan has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. She has proposed to omit all the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Lowan should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Sam Hibbins, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.**Motion agreed to.****Read second time.**

Third reading

Motion agreed to.**Read third time.**

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Peter Walsh's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to provide procedural fairness by way of an appropriate appeal mechanism for councillors subject to suspension.'

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that this bill be now read a second time. The member for Murray Plains has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all of the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Murray Plains should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson

Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Repeal and Advisory Councils Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (49): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie

Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Rulings from the Chair

Unparliamentary language

The SPEAKER (17:14): Before the house finishes for the week, I wish to make a few remarks about language used in debates. The Deputy Speaker and I have noticed this week some slippage in what we consider to be appropriate language for the chamber. Members need to be able to express themselves without resorting to vulgar or crass expressions. I do not intend to repeat any of those expressions here to clarify it for members, but as a guide I ask members to consider what language they and their constituents would expect to hear in a professional meeting and not at after-work drinks and to bear that in mind next sitting week.

Visitor conduct

The SPEAKER (17:14): On a further matter, on 7 May the Premier took a point of order after the disturbance in the gallery and asked me to review what happened. I am now in a position to report back to the house. Members will understand that I will not canvass security arrangements in detail in a public forum, but I can speak about broad policy issues.

The protesters in the gallery that day breached the requirements of attending the public gallery. They also posed a risk to other building users, members, staff and other visitors and so were directed to leave the precinct. The protesters were public visitors, members of the public who were able to sit in the public gallery – in other words, walk-ups. Members should be aware that walk-up visitors pass through security screening, provide photo ID and have their belongings cloaked before sitting in the gallery. The protesters were violent, and violence in the workplace poses an unacceptable risk to members and staff, all of whom are here to do important work.

In considering the obligations that I and the President have under the Parliamentary Precincts Act 2001 we decided that one sensible risk management approach was to close the public gallery to walk-ups for a few weeks. This means that passholders and their guests may use the gallery as usual but, sadly, not members of the community who may simply want to observe their Assembly in action. My role as Speaker is to enforce the rules of this house on behalf of the house and to ensure the Parliamentary Precincts Act is used appropriately to ensure the work of the Parliament continues and that all building users are safe. I consider the matter closed.

Member conduct

The SPEAKER (17:16): On a further matter, last sitting Wednesday afternoon the member for Mildura took a point of order. She sought an apology from the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence for leaving the chamber while the member was speaking earlier in the day and for making comments in debate the member described as inflammatory. It is not the Chair's role to determine whether members should not come and go from the chamber, though if members are to be in the chamber, they should listen to the member on their feet, not interject and not engage in audible conversation. I have reviewed the transcript and do not find that the minister breached any rules or requirements of the house. I do not uphold the point of order.

Political material

The SPEAKER (17:17): On a further note, it is a long-held Westminster convention – and there are many rulings from the Chair – that any form of props, symbols or slogans that represent causes or political points of view are not permitted to be displayed, carried or worn in the chamber. In upholding this ruling I remind members that the rules exist for a reason. It is expected that members can make their points on any issue during debate in this house without the use of any form of visual support. I remind members that I will be upholding this ruling and suggest that there are many opportunities outside of this chamber to express views using symbols. It is also a convention that if there is broad support of the house for the wearing of certain attire – be that beanies, scarves or pins, for example – the will of the house is followed.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.*Adjournment*

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Victoria Police

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:18): (691) My adjournment is to the Minister for Police. The action I seek from the minister is to meet with Victoria Police officers who are currently seeking assistance for post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues relating to traumatic events and hear firsthand their experiences in and concerns about a system that continues to fail them.

Many in this house were present at the time of the motion to honour Senior Constable Bria Joyce. It was a deserving and heartfelt motion. In this motion there were many mentions of Leading Senior Constable Thomas Kinnane. Thomas has served his community since 2001, when he went through the academy in squad 25 of 2001, my sister's squad. In his time he served many years in Mildura, a place he loves to live and work. Since the tragic accident Thomas has had many health issues, including surgeries, and required support for his mental health, but he continues to have a battle that impacts on him each and every day. The impact is not just on him but on his family, his community and his former colleagues.

It is sad to say that Thomas is a former member of the police force, as he had to leave and fight to stay mentally healthy. I know many of his work colleagues have supported him locally, but Thomas has not had the support he requires financially or emotionally to get into ward 17, a treatment facility at Austin Hospital to help police who require inpatient services for mental ill health. Thomas could not get support from Gallagher Bassett, who are contracted to support people like Thomas. There are other circumstances where police officers requiring support have also failed to receive it. Thomas went through a period when all support stopped for him for two weeks and he could not access any financial support for prescriptions. His gym access and rehabilitation have also been stopped. Thomas and the many others in his position deserve support.

The tragic events that saw the loss of life of an amazing local community person in Senior Constable Joyce have impacted Thomas, his family and his community and must never be forgotten. But more than not forgotten, we must support everyone who needs it through these events. I am proud of Thomas for taking the courage to stand up and call this out. Minister, please meet with these victims and make sure they are given the support from us that they deserve after they have given us protection for so many years. There are many Thomases, and we must protect them all.

Pakenham electorate roads

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (17:21): (692) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Pakenham to see the site of the recently funded road improvements to McGregor Road in Pakenham. Through the GAIC, the growth areas infrastructure contribution fund, \$6 million worth of funding was announced to improve traffic in the McGregor Road corridor. We are duplicating the road under the new rail bridge and adding traffic lights at Henty Street. This will be the final part to be duplicated for McGregor Road between the Monash Freeway and Princes Highway. The signalisation will improve safety for vehicles turning from the Henty Street T-junction now that the level crossing at McGregor Road is almost gone – in fact it goes on Monday. I look forward to hosting the minister in my electorate to talk more broadly about roads within the Pakenham electorate and the importance of road safety for my growing community.

Glenrowan traffic noise

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:21): (693) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on behalf of Mr Wes Lawton of Glenrowan. Mr Lawton lives in Glenrowan, which is just out of Wangaratta and the place where Ned Kelly came to grief, which is how most people know Glenrowan very well. It is also situated on the Hume Highway, located on the top of a hill. Combine hills and trucks and engine brakes and it really is a noisy area. We all know small country towns that we drive through where it says 'Please turn off your engine brakes', and we understand that in small communities. But when you live right next to the Hume Highway on the downhill run, all night most nights the engine brakes are roaring. Mr Lawton and other members of the Glenrowan community have asked me to seek an action for the minister to look at putting some signage up to restrict engine brake noise, as we see in small community towns. Although it is on the Hume Highway, there is still an opportunity to do so to give the community members of Glenrowan some peace and quiet during all hours of the night. So if the minister could have her team look at the possible opportunities and sites, particularly on the northbound side, on the downhill side of Glenrowan, I would appreciate it.

Truganina Community Centre

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:23): (694) My adjournment is for the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action I seek is that the minister join me in mighty Truganina to open the brand new Truganina Community Centre. As the minister knows, community centres are a vital piece of local service infrastructure and something that our government can be very proud of having helped bring on line in new areas in my community of Wyndham. Since being elected to this place in 2018 I have had the immense opportunity to open so many new community centres and local facilities, often funded through our government's Growing Suburbs Fund under the suburbs portfolio. This community centre, however, was fortunate enough to receive a total of \$3.15 million from our government through the early childhood portfolio's Building Blocks grant, because we know that community centres like this one provide great spaces for kinder and maternal child health services to support our young kids. This was on top of \$4 million from the Growing Suburbs Fund – such a great fund – in 2021 and a \$1.5 million grant from the Living Libraries infrastructure program.

Once completed, this community centre will have three kindergarten rooms and will provide 99 kinder spaces for children in our local community, along with maternal health and other allied services. With all of this funding I think it is pretty fair to say that this community centre will have it all. This facility is set to open in a couple of weeks, and it would be a great opportunity to welcome the minister back

to Trug to see how our government is providing local facilities in growth suburbs and building the Education State for all ages.

Payroll tax

Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:24): (695) My adjournment is to the Minister for Education, and the action I am seeking is an exemption from the Labor government's payroll tax for Cornish College. Cornish College is a unique and relatively new school. Based in Bangholme, it enrolled its first students in 2012. Previously the site on which Cornish College sits was a campus of St Leonard's College. When that school indicated its intention to close and sell the land a small group of very determined parents and teachers were the driving force in establishing the new school. Getting a school set up is no small matter. The school had to accrue significant debt at the start to be able to operate. Since 2012 the school has slowly worked its way into achieving the most modest financial reserve. But let us be clear: that small surplus is not a profit, despite what those opposite might think. It is money that will be reinvested in the school and service the school's borrowings. As the member for Mordialloc wrote to the Treasurer, Cornish College does not have the financial reserves to meet this tax and meeting their payroll obligations will be detrimental to the school community, the educational programs on offer and the welfare needs of their students.

I want to reflect on the words about the need for welfare for their students. If you talk to any teacher or any principal today, they will tell you the same story: students are more anxious and battle with greater mental health complexities than the generations before them. Cornish College's unique approach is deeply popular with its students and community. Cornish explicitly seek to engage the minds of their students by opening their hearts and nurturing their wellbeing. They seek to foster a holistic view of a sustainable world. I was lucky enough to visit Cornish recently to see what this looks like in practice. The school is immersed in the natural world. Students can join in regular meditative practices. Cornish has 1.2 full-time equivalent psychologists on staff to support their students. They run a community wellbeing series, which creates a space for conversations with young people about important wellbeing matters. Recent topics include vaping and the impact of pornography on young people. Their commitment to student wellbeing is at the heart of the school, but these programs are all at serious risk due to Labor's schools tax.

These programs, the ones that are not strictly academic, will be the first that will have to be reduced or removed altogether. Families will also have to pay more to send their children to Cornish College as a result of Labor's schools tax. Cornish College will have no choice but to increase fees. Cornish families, like most families that send their children to independent schools, scrimp and save to get their kids there. I understand that the minister recently suggested that Cornish should pay the tax because they have a 100-acre campus. Well, I suggest the minister take time to review Cornish's financial position to actually understand how this tax will impact them, rather than making flippant remarks about their campus size. The coalition will always support the diversity and vibrancy of our independent schools because we value school choice for parents. I call on the minister to exempt Cornish College from Labor's independent schools tax.

Mordialloc Creek

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:27): (696) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to update my community on the dredging profile and updates to Mordialloc Creek, which has been a significant investment in our local community. Mordialloc Creek is the jewel in the City of Kingston area, and Mordialloc is a place where people come to enjoy and love our natural environment and beautiful community. My electorate is named after the combination of words 'little creek by the sea', and the Bunurong land through there has supported generations of First Nations people. It has always been a beautiful meeting place, and together now with the mouth of Mordialloc Creek coming in and with all the boats and communities there it is a really spectacular place. But with inland storm surges, sediment coming down from Eumemmerring Creek and Mordialloc Creek really builds up and impacts on the natural environment

and on the Mordialloc Creek community boaties through there. I was really proud to team up with a former minister for environment Minister D'Ambrosio, who secured funding for dredging of Mordialloc Creek. Mordialloc has an incredible profile coming up. We have got level crossing removals coming through, we have got the creek updates coming, we have upgrades to Mordialloc College with three stages of improvements and the STEM centre on the way and then to think about the real heart of Mordialloc being that creek – everything in Mordialloc is improving over time. I am really keen to get an update from the Minister for the Environment on the dredging profile there, the timelines for our community and how that will support the Mordialloc Creek community.

Energy policy

Tim READ (Brunswick) (17:29): (697) My adjournment is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is that the government introduces minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties to provide greater ongoing cost-of-living relief for renters in the form of lower energy bills. Up until this year the Victorian government was handing out annual \$250 power saving bonuses directly to households. This year the federal government announced a similar \$300 payment. While no-one is complaining about governments providing direct cost-of-living relief at the moment, I cannot help but wonder whether or not there is a far better way to help households than giving money to households to pass straight on to their energy companies. Effectively, subsidising energy companies provides no long-term environmental benefits, and it does not provide any substantial ongoing reductions in household energy bills to meaningfully assist with the rising cost of living. These policies do nothing to address the fact that next year people's energy bills will still be high, if not higher, while their houses will still be freezing in winter and boiling in summer.

Home energy experts such as the NGO Renew are clear that the best way to cut household energy bills is, first, to draught-seal homes and install window treatments and insulation and, second, to replace inefficient gas and electric appliances with heat pumps to transition a home to all electric with solar panels. The annual energy savings for even doing a few of these things would be many times the small bonuses provided by the government, up to thousands of dollars in savings to Victorians every single year. The government must mandate minimum energy standards for rentals, and these standards need to be enforced in rental properties. A good place to start would be to require all rental ads to provide an energy efficiency rating or the indicative heating and cooling bill costs for listed properties and require them to professionally seal all exposed holes and draughts. Requiring old appliances to be replaced with modern efficient reverse-cycle air conditioning and heat pump hot water should be immediately mandated for all rentals, rather than the current requirement, which allows landlords to install just any old heater, as they currently do. Progressive land tax incentives for landlords who improve the energy efficiency of their rentals as they electrify, insulate and install solar should be considered along with the new minimum energy efficiency standards to help speed the transition.

Southbank police station

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:32): (698) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. The action I am seeking is for the Minister for Police to visit Southbank police station in my seat of Albert Park to meet with the wonderful police officers who work so hard every day to keep our community safe. Every day police officers are out on the beat patrolling at all hours in any weather, often putting themselves at risk for the safety of the community. The Allan Labor government continues to support them with a record \$4.5 billion investment in Victoria Police, which includes funding for over 3600 additional officers. I am pleased to report that the Southbank police station's division has received 79 new police as part of this investment.

A member: That's incredible.

Nina TAYLOR: Indeed. This government has also invested almost \$1 billion to deliver new and upgraded police stations across our state, which includes \$52 million for a new South Melbourne police station in my electorate. In addition to that, this government has invested over \$1.1 million across 12 crime prevention grants to improve community safety in my community. I would like to

thank our government for ensuring Victoria Police have the resources and tools they need to keep our community safe. I look forward to meeting the members at Southbank police station with the minister.

State Emergency Service Manningham unit

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:33): (699) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that I seek is for the minister to fully fund our SES and its training programs. Vincent Ciardulli, the controller of Manningham SES, wrote to me recently to highlight the impacts his unit is experiencing due to the continued funding shortfalls, especially regarding emergency response driver training and new recruit training. He wrote:

As a Controller I have a responsibility to ensure the unit has the ability to respond to Priority 1 events with the use of light and sirens to expedite travel.

This is known as Emergency Vehicle Response Driving and members must complete an online training module, however due to funding there is no provision of any practical training or assessments being provided to my team members.

To provide myself with more comfort about the safety of members and the public, I am proposing we raise or use savings to fund sending the members on an advanced/defensive driving course.

The provision of such training should be aligned to other agencies given the risk is the same, however the ongoing under-funding of VICSES has seen this gap remain over many years.

As a unit we recruit new members and are required to conduct their initial training (Crew Member Supervised). This requires an additional 2–3 days of weekend training that we must conduct as volunteers. The ongoing lack of funding results in an insufficient number of paid trainers at VICSES to schedule and run this training.

Despite the fact that this government has routinely underfunded our SES, Manningham SES has experienced over the past five years more than double the rescue events, double the events assisting Victoria Police, seven times the amount of ambulance assists, four times the amount of fire services assists and a 40 per cent increase in SES requests for assistance as well as an increase in fundraising efforts, which are 10 times the previous five years. The above figures represent the shared commitment all volunteers at Manningham SES make to serving the community in times of need. As our SES will never hesitate to protect our communities, I hope the minister will not hesitate to protect those who keep us safe.

Housing

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (17:35): (700) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Development Victoria, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to join me in visiting the Coomoora development in Springvale South. We know the Victorian government is fiercely committed to creating more opportunities for Victorians to own their own home and to increasing access to affordable, modern housing so Victorians can live in a community where they can be close to public transport, jobs, schools and services and to the community. We can see this in our growing community in the south-east, where the government is getting on with delivering more homes and reaching significance development milestones, particularly in Springvale South, where I understand that all the townhouses and land lots are now sold out at the Coomoora development, which offers a mix of land use and townhouses as well as high-quality community open space to enjoy. It is exciting to see the construction of the 47 townhouses in progress, with Creation Projects appointed to deliver these new homes on behalf of Development Victoria.

A key attraction of Coomoora is the priority access scheme, which increases supply of homes suitable for various budgets by allowing those eligible for affordable housing a chance to purchase a home before they are offered to the general public. This is an important initiative for our community, and it has helped see a range of buyers attracted to Coomoora, including first home buyers, growing families and downsizers, thanks to the diverse and affordable housing options on offer at the convenient location. The development of the site met the government objective of delivering homes of various

sizes and prices to cater for different lifestyles and budgets close to jobs, services and transport. I commend the minister and look forward to his response.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:37): The member for Berwick raised an adjournment for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action that he sought is that the minister meet with police officers experiencing PTSD. The member for Pakenham raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that she sought is that the minister join her to see the impacts of a \$6 million commitment to improve the McGregor Road corridor in her electorate – fabulous. The member for Ovens Valley also raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that he sought is that the minister look at the ways in which engine brake noise can be mitigated for the people of Glenrowan.

The member for Laverton raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action that she sought is that the minister join her in her lower electorate at Truganina to see the community centre that is being developed there with funding from our government from the Growing Suburbs Fund, from the Building Blocks fund and from the Living Libraries fund. I am sure the minister looks forward to doing that. The member for Kew raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action she sought is that the minister consider payroll tax in relation to Cornish College. I know the member would really welcome the news that in fact that college did receive \$4 million of funding from our Labor government to support the development of a VCE centre. That is a pretty significant investment in that independent school.

The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and the action that he sought was an update on the dredging plan at the Mordialloc Creek. Thank you for sharing the significance of the Mordialloc Creek to the people of your community but also its significance to the Bunurong people over millennia.

The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action that he seeks is that the minister consider how to incentivise energy-efficient appliance standards for rental properties. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police. The action that the member seeks is that the minister join her at the Southbank police station, which under our government has seen more than 70 additional police employed, I think.

Nina Taylor interjected.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Fifty-nine. Anyway, I am sure the minister will look forward to visiting those police officers with the member.

The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services. The action that she seeks is that the minister provide additional funding to the SES. And the member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for Development Victoria. He is seeking that the minister join him at the Coomoora development in Springvale South. I know that the minister would very much welcome that opportunity, because it is an opportunity to see the support and investment that our government is making to ensure that we are bringing on more housing supply. Indeed the member talked about the 47 townhouses that are being built on that site. It is a very important initiative for the member's community, and as I said, I am sure the minister will look forward to joining him at Coomoora.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, members. Thank you to the clerks, the attendants and the staff across the Parliament. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:42 pm.