



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 18 June 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**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	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 <sup>5</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	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 <sup>6</sup>	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

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>6</sup> 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

# CONTENTS

---

CONDOLENCES	
Hon. Louis Stuart Lieberman AM .....	2141
BILLS	
Youth Justice Bill 2024 .....	2145
Introduction and first reading .....	2145
ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Acting Public Advocate .....	2146
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion and orders of the day .....	2146
PETITIONS	
Berwick electorate telecommunications infrastructure .....	2146
Mornington Peninsula parking .....	2146
Trafalgar police resources .....	2147
Labour policy .....	2147
DOCUMENTS	
Guidelines for Classification of Computer Games 2023 .....	2147
COMMITTEES	
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee .....	2148
Independent Performance Audit of the Auditor-General and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office 2024: Budget Variation .....	2148
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee .....	2148
Alert Digest No. 8 .....	2148
DOCUMENTS	
Documents .....	2148
BILLS	
Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024 .....	2149
Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 .....	2149
Council's agreement .....	2149
Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024 .....	2149
Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024 .....	2149
Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 .....	2149
State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024 .....	2149
Royal assent .....	2149
Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 .....	2150
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024 .....	2150
Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 .....	2150
State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 .....	2150
Appropriation .....	2150
COMMITTEES	
Legal and Social Issues Committee .....	2150
Reference .....	2150
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Victorian Auditor-General's Office .....	2151
Performance audit .....	2151
MOTIONS	
Daniel Andrews AC .....	2151
Middle East conflict .....	2151
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Standing and sessional orders .....	2151
Program .....	2152
MEMBERS	
Minister for Planning .....	2154
Absence .....	2154
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
John Setka .....	2154
Ministers statements: rental reform .....	2156
Youth crime .....	2157
Ministers statements: rental reform .....	2158
Health services .....	2158
Ministers statements: housing .....	2159

# CONTENTS

---

Energy policy .....	2160
Ministers statements: housing .....	2161
Home building industry .....	2162
Ministers statements: housing .....	2163
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Berwick electorate .....	2164
Lara electorate .....	2164
Mildura electorate .....	2164
Northcote electorate .....	2165
South-West Coast electorate .....	2165
Narre Warren South electorate .....	2165
Richmond electorate .....	2165
Glen Waverley electorate .....	2166
Rowville electorate .....	2166
Sunbury electorate .....	2166
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Program .....	2166
Victorian Auditor-General's Office .....	2170
Performance audit .....	2170
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Land tax .....	2170
Ashwood High School .....	2171
Pinewood Primary School .....	2171
Euroa electorate schools .....	2171
Vietnamese–Australian Seniors Association of Victoria .....	2172
Peter Manders .....	2172
Melton electorate fuel prices .....	2172
Family Life, Beaumaris .....	2173
Hampton multicultural festival .....	2173
Blé Sucré Patisserie, Mentone .....	2173
Community safety .....	2173
Charlton College .....	2173
Australian International Academy .....	2173
Shepparton electorate crime .....	2174
Teachers .....	2174
Riverdale North Primary School .....	2174
Primary school leaders forum .....	2175
Lara Primary School .....	2175
Energy policy .....	2175
Reclink Community Cup .....	2176
Women's Health in the South East .....	2176
Regional health services .....	2176
Narracan electorate volunteers .....	2176
Frankston Central post office .....	2176
Parliament House gardens .....	2177
Bayswater electorate sporting facilities .....	2177
Angliss Hospital .....	2177
Daniel Andrews AC .....	2177
Westside Community Desexing .....	2177
Wendouree electorate sporting facilities .....	2178
Ballarat Hindu Temple & Cultural Centre .....	2178
Philippines Independence Day .....	2178
Eid al-Adha .....	2178
Cranbourne Football Netball Club .....	2178
BILLS	
Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 .....	2179
Second reading .....	2179
ADJOURNMENT	
Land tax .....	2213
Cambridge Reserve, Hoppers Crossing .....	2214
Patient transport .....	2214
Recycle4Change .....	2215
Nepean electorate housing .....	2215

# CONTENTS

---

Ripon electorate housing.....	2216
Narracan electorate housing .....	2216
Bruce Park, Frankston .....	2217
Traffic accident reports .....	2217
Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Queenscliff flotilla.....	2217
Responses .....	2218





**Tuesday 18 June 2024**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Condolences***Hon. Louis Stuart Lieberman AM**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:05): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Louis Stuart Lieberman AM and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Benambra from 1976 to 1992, Minister for Planning from 1979 to 1982, Assistant Minister of Health from 1979 to 1981, Minister of Mines and Minister for Minerals and Energy in 1981, and Minister for Local Government from 1981 to 1982.

Lou Lieberman was the epitome of a self-made man – a boy who grew up on the border and prided himself on the life he created, using only his hand, his heart and his mind. And there was a lot to be proud of: serving not only in this place but also in our nation’s capital and also his work as a minister, making and remaking our state. Nothing, though, could compare to the loves of his life, his wife Marj and their three children David, Justine and Ben.

Lou’s beginnings were humble. Leaving school early due to his father’s illness, he persevered with private study, fuelled by a fire in his belly and an eye to the future. Later on in life Lou went on to work in a range of roles that could only be described as, well, pretty diverse, and he was often fond, apparently, of regaling people about his unique résumé pre politics, with experience as a dairy factory worker, a musician, a shop assistant, a storeman and a serviceman before going on to find work as a clerk in a local solicitor’s office. In that office he would work by day and study by night, gaining his qualification through a correspondence course. However, it was beneath the rafters of that grand Albury train station’s verandah that Lou found his purpose. There, when working as a newsboy for the *Border Mail*, Lou would meet the man that sparked his life pursuit, Robert Menzies. It was not, though, until 1976 that Lou would get his chance, standing for the Liberal Party in what was then the very staunchly National Party held seat of Benambra – I like him already. Back then Lou’s win was a big shock. It was appropriate for an MP, though, who became known as a big man with big ideas, and at 194 centimetres, he was perhaps literally the biggest man in the Victorian Parliament.

Not long after his election he joined the Hamer government ministry. At different times Lou served our state in a range of different roles, as I outlined earlier – Assistant Minister of Health, Minister for Minerals and Energy, Minister of Mines and Minister for Local Government – though it was in his time as planning minister that Lou perhaps left his greatest legacy in this state. He was passionate about our state, declaring Melbourne the greatest man-made city in the world. He was also passionate about making sure it grew in the right way, and some of the battles he fought then are as familiar to those of us in the chamber today as they were then – his reforms to enable home owners to build a flat or unit in their yard, for example, as well as his determination to reduce the over-reliance on spread and sprawl, instead encouraging developers, as he said, to look back towards the city and build in the well-established inner suburbs. He also introduced our state’s first ever heritage control laws, understanding that growth and history could coexist. Certainly the beautiful streetscapes of Beechworth, Chiltern and Yackandandah stand as a monument to that legacy.

In 1993 Lou decided he wanted to deliver even more for our state’s beautiful north-east region, putting his hand up to represent the community in the federal seat of Indi. In both this chamber and in Canberra serving in the federal Parliament, Lou was an eloquent voice for respectful debate and also an ardent believer in the power of service. In his first speech in Canberra, following on from his first speech

## CONDOLENCES

2142

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday 18 June 2024

here, Lou explained why after 16 years on Spring Street he had decided to go to Canberra. He quoted people as saying:

‘Lou, why are you doing this? Wouldn’t you have had enough ...’, but above all they said to my wife, ‘Why are you letting him do it after all of the years in State Parliament?’.

He would reply:

The fact is, we are a team. We believe in Australia very much and we also take the view that everyone has a responsibility to serve ...

I think this says a lot about the man Lou Lieberman was and the team he and Marj were together. I said earlier that Lou’s greatest love was his family, and without a doubt that is true. His next greatest love, though, was his community. Lou was passionate about achieving for the people of the state’s north-east and achieving more broadly for regional Victoria. He carried that determination with him too outside of his time in politics, going on to serve in a number of positions across the community in housing, health and education. What defined each of those roles and indeed all of Lou’s life was that constant commitment to service.

On behalf of the government, the Parliament and the people of Victoria, I extend our heartfelt condolences to Lou’s family, colleagues and friends, in particular his best friend and greatest support Marj, his children David, Justine and Ben and his beloved grandchildren. We thank Lou for his service, and we thank his family for sharing him with the state of Victoria.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (12:11): I am very honoured to join in support of this condolence motion for a very highly respected figure in our community and in this Parliament and federal Parliament. The passing of the Honourable Louis Stuart Lieberman AM this year at the age of 85 marks the loss of a deeply respected local champion.

Lou had the rare honour of serving in both the Victorian Legislative Assembly for the electorate of Benambra and the Australian House of Representatives for the electorate of Indi. He was a dedicated parliamentarian, capable minister and Liberal Party stalwart who was known for his generosity of spirit, his great intellect and his advocacy on behalf of the community.

Lou was born in Swan Hill in 1938, the fourth of five children. As a boy he moved to Albury with his family and attended the city’s public primary and high schools. He was called up to perform national service and served in the 8th/13th Victorian Mounted Rifles, working with Centurion tanks. Prior to entering politics he worked as a solicitor and barrister and was part of the local consultative council for the development of an Albury–Wodonga national growth centres decentralisation plan.

Lou was drawn to political life, as many others are, as it provided a platform to raise important issues that he cared about, such as the challenges facing Victorian farmers, the future of rural communities and the necessity of community leadership. In 1976 Lou was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly as the Liberal member for Benambra, and he served for 16 years between the years 1976 and 1992. His maiden speech to this house demonstrated his dedication to the Albury–Wodonga project, a unique cross-border arrangement that illustrates the spirit of cooperative federalism. In particular he highlighted that strong regional centres like Albury–Wodonga were needed to ‘slow down the uncontrolled growth of Sydney and Melbourne’ – prescient remarks even then – a sentiment which would likely be shared by many Victorians today.

His ministerial career was distinguished. It spanned five portfolios across the Hamer and Thompson Liberal governments, including Assistant Minister of Health, Minister for Planning, Minister for Minerals and Energy, Minister of Mines and Minister for Local Government. A highlight of his ministerial career was ensuring that the facade of the historic Rialto building in Collins Street was retained when the new tower was erected on the site – and how grateful Victorians will be for that great achievement.

## CONDOLENCES

Tuesday 18 June 2024

Legislative Assembly

2143

Lou resigned from state politics and successfully stood for the Liberal Party in the seat of Indi at the 1993 federal election. As a member of the Howard government he argued in favour of gun control in the wake of the terrible and horrific Port Arthur massacre and campaigned for the removal of the railway from central Wodonga, among his many achievements. He went on to serve for eight years in the Commonwealth Parliament before retiring in 2001.

After retiring from politics, and true to character, Lou stayed active in his community, leading the boards of Albury Wodonga Health and the Hume Bank. He also chaired the gift-giving committee for the Mercy Million building appeal for health services. He always had time for others, and the current member for Benambra has outlined how Lou was both ‘a great statesman’ and ‘a man of conviction’, who truly loved being active in his local community. In 2016 Lou was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for significant service to the parliaments of Australia and Victoria and to the Albury–Wodonga community – and how fitting that award was.

On behalf of the Victorian opposition, I convey our appreciation for the Honourable Louis Stuart Lieberman AM for his service to the people of Victoria, the people of Australia and, on our side of the house, the Liberal movement and the wider community. I also wish to extend our sincere condolences to his loving wife Marj, his children and grandchildren, of whom there are many, and his many, many friends and supporters. Vale, Lou Lieberman.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (12:15): I rise to join the condolence motion for Lou Lieberman. As has been said, Lou was born in Swan Hill in 1938, and as a six-year-old his family moved to Albury. He grew up as part of a very close-knit family with his parents and four siblings. He married Marjorie, and together they had three children: David, Justine and Ben. Lou had four grandchildren as well: Allison, Katrina, Alex and Gemma.

His father had come to Australia in 1920 to escape post-World War I England for a better life in Australia. That is what Lou remembered from his family as to what they did to help people, particularly First World War veterans, to acclimatise back into society and face the challenges they had. I think that sense of duty was borne through when his father became ill when he was in high school and he left school to do the jobs, which have already been spoken about, to support his family through that particular time as a dairy factory worker, a musician, a shop assistant, a storeman and a newspaper seller. He then went on to work as a law clerk while he studied to become a barrister and a solicitor.

As has been said, he entered politics on 20 March 1976 as the member for Benambra. Yes, it was a close-fought election against one Bill Baxter, who was subsequently elected to the upper house after that and went on to serve 35 years in the upper house. Although they were adversaries at that particular election, they both remained very close parliamentarians in working for that area because Bill’s office was also in Wodonga. Lou served that community well through that time.

As has already been said, at that time, at 6 foot 4 – much more relevant than 193 centimetres for most people – he was a large man and larger than life in his communities. He took on a number of roles in the Victorian Parliament, including after three years in Parliament becoming the Minister for Planning under the Hamer government and Assistant Minister of Health. He went on to hold other portfolios, as the Minister of Mines, Minister for Minerals and Energy and Minister for Local Government. Then when the Liberal government lost, he went on to serve a number of portfolios in opposition through that particular time. If you read his history – I will not go into it today – he had an interesting relationship with one Jeffrey Kennett through some of those years when he was apparently in the shadow cabinet and then when he was not in the shadow cabinet. As the folklore of that time goes, some chairs moved around quite a few times in those years leading up to the Kennett government being elected in 1992.

In 1993 Lou transitioned to federal politics, becoming the member for Indi, and he served in that role through until 2001, continuing his dedication to public service at a national level. He was on several

## CONDOLENCES

committees in the federal Parliament, including chairing the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Joint Committee on Publications.

I suppose if people asked Lou what his greatest contributions were in public life, he would talk about the significant reforms he made as the planning minister, establishing a one-stop shop for building permits and introducing heritage planning controls, particularly protecting prominent areas like Beechworth in his electorate for their architectural history. In the education and health portfolios he worked in both those areas to make a lasting impact, particularly in regional Victoria, around schools and hospitals and established a university presence in his region, which is still there today and which is a very valuable part of that community now.

As has been said, he was very interested in community development. In his inaugural speech when he entered this place he talked very much about the Albury–Wodonga growth area and how proud he was of that. There are two things which stand out in my mind from his speech then: he talked about the fact that the natural gas pipeline was shortly to come to Albury–Wodonga, which was a great boon to industry in that particular area, and he also talked about the fact that the Dartmouth Dam project was well underway. Those that understand the history of water in the Murray–Darling Basin would understand that it was the building of Dartmouth and the subsequent storage of water in Dartmouth that enabled us to go through the millennium drought with the Murray River still running. Although there was not much irrigation water, there was still enough water for communities and everything to function. If it had not been for Dartmouth, you could very easily have had a dry Murray River, like they did in 1914 in one of the previous droughts. So he was very proud that those projects were well underway when he came in.

He often reflected on the influence of his parents, who were active in community service and, as I said, particularly in helping ex-servicemen regain their health after World War I. As I said, his father left England to get away from the tragedy of World War I in England and the restrictions and the lifestyle, which was hampered by the lack of goods, services and food over there, to come to Australia for a better life. He was always inspired by their interest and activity in the community. He credited his marriage to Marj as a turning point in his life, providing him with unwavering support in his public affairs efforts. He was known for his approachability and his availability and always made a point of being accessible to people in all walks of life and political backgrounds.

He took on a number of roles after leaving politics. He was still active in his community. He was president of the Wodonga Liberal Party, whatever that means, and he was involved in various community groups including soccer clubs, the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal and the Vermont Court aged care hostel. As was said, he served and did national service as a young man, and he actually served as a major in the army reserve, which again exemplified his service to the community over that particular time. He was actively involved with Albury Wodonga Health, and in 2016 he served as the chairperson of that particular health authority. He has been praised for his generosity, his intellect and his passion for his community, and his former colleagues and constituents remember him as a man of great intellect and dedication to public service. In 2016 he was awarded an Order of Australia not only for his service to the parliaments but particularly for the service of his community there.

Lou Lieberman's life story is one of resilience, dedication and profound service to his community and country. From his early days working various jobs to support his family to his impactful career in state and federal politics and his continued community involvement post politics, Lou exemplifies a life dedicated to the betterment of society. He embodied the quintessential Australian spirit of resilience, dedication and service. His legacy will endure through the many lives he touched and the significant improvements that he championed. As we honour his memory, let us draw inspiration from his example and continue to serve our community with the same passion and integrity and by reflecting the best of Australian values that Lou demonstrated. Vale, Lou Lieberman.

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (12:22): I intend to make a very, very brief contribution, because Lou was a man of very little fuss and bother, and in respect to Lou and my relationship over many years

that I had with Lou, I will try and impart and share a couple of those with the Assembly, certainly knowing that trust with the family, with Marj, was absolutely sacrosanct. Can I at this point thank the Premier for her well-researched and completely accurate account of Lou. He truly embodied statesmanship, honesty and integrity and, as I said, no fuss and bother, and I am sure that the Lieberman family will appreciate those very generous words, like those from the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Nationals. But while I am on about the Nationals, it is quite funny because –

**A member:** We're coming for you, mate.

**Bill TILLEY:** I have heard those rumours. Can I say that, like Lou in our first elections – yes, Lou defeated Bill Baxter, but in my first one in 2006 Bill Baxter was also a candidate for that one. Anyway, in a couple of years it will no doubt be back on again. But when I was first preselected I sought Lou and Marj out – and they were an incredible team, incredible parents. They knew and truly loved the district, as I do and as many of us do up there – incredible. But they provided me with some terrific advice, which I will not overly share, but it was the good, it was the bad and it was the ugly, and the whole lot of it has come true. I was just a baggy-arsed senior constable of police, so I did not know what the hell I was getting myself into, and it has been a significant learning curve over the last five terms of this Parliament. I knew I could always go to Lou and ask for some advice, and he would give it to me very clearly, very directly, and we would have the business done and be on for a cup of tea. But he was humble – extremely humble – and a great statesman.

His service was, after passing on 17 May, just a few short days before his 86th birthday, and the town was very well represented at Sacred Heart Church in Wodonga. It was incredible to see a lot of people there of all persuasions, of all types of politics and of all kinds of religions. Unfortunately, because he succumbed to that insidious disease of dementia, his final years were very, very challenging and difficult – and for Marj. But in saying that, no-one has forgotten Lou or his contribution to the north-east of Victoria.

On that, I think that it is best left at that, because as the family said, they did not want the fuss and bother. But for David, Justine and Ben, and for the grandchildren – he was a great grandparent. As I share stories with the Speaker – Speaker, you love your grandkids, as do all of us in this place that have had the privilege to have a few grandkids now. We love our future generations. On that note, rest in peace, Lou. Vale, Lou Lieberman.

**Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:27): I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Louis Stuart Lieberman AM, the house now adjourns until 1:30 pm today.

**Motion agreed to.**

**House adjourned 12:28 pm.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER took the chair at 1:33 pm.**

### *Bills*

#### **Youth Justice Bill 2024**

##### *Introduction and first reading*

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (13:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to provide for the reform of the youth justice system, to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and other related acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (13:34): I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (13:34): The bill is to establish a new Youth Justice Act, YJ act, as a standalone legislative framework to better respond to alleged offending by children and young people, raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12, introduce an electronic monitoring trial for young people on bail alongside an enhanced bail supervision and support service, repeal provisions from the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 that are reformed or re-enacted by the YJ act, set out transitional provisions and make consequential amendments to other acts.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

### *Announcements*

#### **Acting Public Advocate**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (13:35): I wish to advise the house that on 5 June 2024 the Speaker administered to Daniel Gilbert Leighton, the acting Public Advocate, the oath required by section 14 of the Guardianship and Administration Act 2019.

### *Business of the house*

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

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (13:35): General business, notice of motion 20 and orders of the day 5 and 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

### *Petitions*

#### **Berwick electorate telecommunications infrastructure**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) presented a petition bearing 134 signatures:

The Petition of residents in Victoria calls on the Legislative Assembly to note that:

Currently in the Minta Estate Berwick and region surrounding and including Halcyon Stockland Berwick there is no reliable phone reception for residents. Residents are unable to get enough phone signal to make basic call functions. The newly developed area does not have sufficient communication infrastructure to support the amount of coverage that is needed. People are concerned they are unable to make basic calls in times of emergency.

The petitioners, therefore, call on the Legislative Assembly to review planning laws to ensure adequate communication infrastructure is installed for residents in new regions and to immediately install reliable communications infrastructure for residents in the Minta Farm and Halcyon Stockland Berwick region.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

#### **Mornington Peninsula parking**

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) presented a petition bearing 3316 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the paid parking pilot introduced in Nov '23 is having grave negative effects on small business, local residents, families and visitors. Business sale declines of upto 20%, numerous negative reviews, fines and complaints have presented to local councillors, its CEO and relevant shire teams with little response or concern. The area operates under a video number plate recognition system that only allows 15 minutes from entry at the esplanade to exit before an infringement is issued via the mail. This is not stated on any signage and could be seen as fraudulent as one may not be physically parked but merely looking for a spot, commercially doing a delivery, be on MYC private property, a service technician, an Uber driver, awaiting a takeaway service from the hospitality venues, a Motorcyclist parked on a legal footpath, be assisting a grandparent or disabled person. The e-permit process

on line is clunky and no grace period is allowed for residents with registrations in an eligible areas. No tap and pay facilities are offered, only APP or QR online severely inhibiting the elderly visiting our public area. Mornington's famous picnic family friendly park, pier and foreshore area should NOT be the target of a local councils funding crisis. Alternative means to raise funds need tabling rather than targeting local well established businesses recovering from a global pandemic and removing the free use from both local families and families abroad the public gems we have. The public park and its surrounds have never been so quiet and unfrequented. The overflow of parking has only expanded into neighbouring streets creating stress abroad. Save our public areas, support small business, increase tourism and its flow on effects.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to remove the current Mornington Peninsula Paid Parking pilot programme immediately.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### **Trafalgar police resources**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 4 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the current situation with police availability in Trafalgar and the surrounding areas. Population is growing rapidly with new housing states and residences being built. The station is only open limited hours and residents are concerned as crime is increasing, police availability is still extremely limited. Given a number of serious incidents that occurred in the local community, there is a real need to ensure 24 hour police availability for local residents and their safety.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to invest in police resources and availability at Trafalgar Police Station to ensure the safety of the local community.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### **Labour policy**

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) presented a petition bearing 170 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly ... The Workplace Injury rehabilitation compensation amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Bill 2023. The bill was introduced into parliament without any consultation with injured workers and does not accurately reflect the significant contributing factors to the scheme. Injured workers are being blamed for the rising costs within the system, but proper consultation with these workers has shown that the reason their claims go on for such lengthy periods is largely due to issues such as unreasonable demands for workers to attend multiple IME (independent medical examinations) appointments, the lack of training of case managers, and the failure of WorkSafe to regulate their external contractors hired to administer the scheme. Punishing injured workers by capping claims and reducing the percentage of a pre-injury wage for mental health injuries due to the drastic increase in "mental health and long-tail claims" is not a viable solution. Nor is it an ethical one. The direct and indirect cost on injured workers and their families and the adverse effects on health and well-being will be felt across all aspects of society.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to undo the changes and undertake detailed and thorough discussions with injured workers and their advocates to improve the system for all.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### *Documents*

#### **Guidelines for Classification of Computer Games 2023**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (13:38): I table, by leave, the Guidelines for Classification of Computer Games 2023.

*Committees***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

*Independent Performance Audit of the Auditor-General and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office 2024: Budget Variation*

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (13:38): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: *Independent Performance Audit of the Auditor-General and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office 2024: Budget Variation*.

**Ordered that report be published.**

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Alert Digest No. 8*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (13:39): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 8* of 2024 on the following bills:

Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024

Local Government Amendment (Governance and Integrity) Bill 2024

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024

Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024

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

State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

*Documents***Documents**

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* – Order under s 17B granting a licence over Euroa I49 Bushland Reserve

*Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984* – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to EPA Designation – Classification of black coal fly ash (*Gazette G23, 6 June 2024*)

*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Bayside C186, C198

Brimbank C240

Frankston C152

Greater Bendigo C242

Kingston C222

Latrobe C136

Macedon Ranges C153

Melbourne C401, C470

Monash C167

Moorabool C104

Mornington Peninsula C300



Stonnington C324

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* – SR 41

*Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* – SR 46

*Road Safety Act 1986* – SR 43

*Service Victoria Act 2018* – SR 38

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – SRs 37, 40

*Transfer of Land Act 1958* – SR 39

*Victoria Police Act 2013* – SR 42

*Water Act 1989* – SR 44

*Wildlife Act 1975* – SR 45

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 32, 37, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46

Documents under s 16B in relation to *Environment Protection Act 2017*

EPA Designation – Classification of black coal fly ash

EPA Determination under s 48(a) – Exemption from requirement to hold a development licence – black coal fly ash

EPA Determination under s 48(c) – Exemption from requirement to hold a permit – black coal fly ash

EPA Determination under s 48(d) – Exemption from requirement to hold a registration – black coal fly ash

Trust for Nature (Victoria) – Report 2022–23.

**PROCLAMATIONS** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

*Land (Revocation of Reservations) Act 2024* – Whole Act (other than Part 3) – 1 June 2024 (*Gazette S274, 28 May 2024*)

*Service Victoria Amendment Act 2024* – Whole Act – 29 May 2024 (*Gazette S275, 28 May 2024*).

### ***Bills***

#### **Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024**

#### **Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024**

*Council's agreement*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (13:40): I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024 and the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 without amendment.

#### **Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024**

#### **Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024**

#### **Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024**

#### **State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024**

*Royal assent*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (13:41): I inform the house that the Lieutenant-Governor has given royal assent to the Appropriation (2024–2025) Bill 2024, the Appropriation (Parliament 2024–2025) Bill 2024, the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 and the State Taxation Amendment Bill 2024.

**Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024**  
**Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024**  
**Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024**  
**State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024**

*Appropriation*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (13:41): I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Aboriginal Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024, the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 and the State Sporting Legislation Amendment Bill 2024.

*Committees*

**Legal and Social Issues Committee**

*Reference*

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:41): I move, by leave:

That this house requires the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 31 December 2024, on the impact on social cohesion of the deep antisemitism that exists in Victoria. Particularly the committee should consider:

- (1) pleas by the community, including the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, that the level of antisemitism has reached a point where the time for listening is over and the time for action is here;
- (2) that despite the state government accepting 34 recommendations to increase anti-vilification laws three years ago only one of the recommendations has been implemented;
- (3) Victoria Police findings through Operation Park that between 7 October 2023 and 11 June 2024 197 alleged criminal incidents occurred relating to the Middle East conflict and that of those incidents:
  - (a) 88 reports, 44.7 per cent, related to antisemitic incidents; and
  - (b) of the 47.2 per cent where a direct motive was not clear, 87, or 93.5 per cent, were politically motivated by opposition to Israel's Gaza policy;
- (4) the recent community security group findings through the Jewish community incident reporting on university campuses that 50 antisemitic or anti-Israel incidents are now occurring on campus each week, up from 11 over the entire year of 2023;
- (5) the ongoing incitement of violence and hatred towards Jewish people, including the recent public graffiti on a Jewish school despicably stating 'Jew die';
- (6) the need for stronger move-on laws, which Labor stripped away in 2015, to enable police to keep the peace and protect faith communities and others across our community from harassment;
- (7) the need for greater legal protections against doxxing of Jews following the social media profiles, pictures and occupations of 700 Jewish Australians being shared online; and
- (8) the behaviour of taxpayer-funded Victorian government staff, including the Victorian Public Sector Commission advisory board member Tasneem Chopra and Victorian Multicultural Commission's commissioner Mohamed Mohideen.

**Leave refused.**

***Business of the house*****Victorian Auditor-General's Office***Performance audit*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:44): I move, by leave:

That:

- (1) this house notes that on 5 October 2023 the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly agreed that under section 82 of the Audit Act 1994 MartinJenkins be appointed to conduct the performance audit of the Auditor-General and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office in 2023–24 and further notes the recommendation in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report *Independent Performance Audit of the Auditor-General and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office 2024: Budget Variation*, tabled 18 June 2024;
- (2) a budget variation of an additional \$30,000 (excluding GST) be approved for MartinJenkins to deliver the performance audit of the Auditor-General and the Victoria Auditor-General's Office by the end of July 2024; and
- (3) a message be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement to the budget variation.

**Motion agreed to.**

***Motions*****Daniel Andrews AC**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:45): I move, by leave:

That this house notes community concern following the decision by the Council of the Order of Australia to appoint former Premier Daniel Andrews a Companion of the Order of Australia for eminent service to public health, considering his mismanagement of the health system and his blatant disregard for mental health.

**Leave refused.**

**Middle East conflict**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (13:46): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since this house resolved on 17 October 2023 to stand with Israel:
  - (a) Israel's military has killed or injured over 37,000 Palestinians;
  - (b) Israel's siege of Gaza is putting over a million Palestinians at risk of famine; and
- (2) does not support Israel's continued invasion of Gaza.

**Leave refused.**

***Business of the house*****Standing and sessional orders**

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (13:46): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 15, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business time to be moved immediately.

**Leave refused.**

### Program

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:47): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 20 June 2024:

Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024

Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024.

It is a privilege again to stand in this place on what is of course the last week before a much-anticipated winter break. Before I talk to the government business program for this final week I take the opportunity on my feet to acknowledge those that got up to speak on the condolence motion for the Honourable Lou Lieberman MP. Lou Lieberman was a member of Parliament for it felt like forever when I was a young person growing up in Wodonga, coming from a Labor family of course. I did share the member for Benambra's glee in the fact that he did knock off a Nat, but on this side of the place we also anticipate the impending retirement of the member for Benambra, and we will see what may well happen up there. But Lou Lieberman was a man who was well respected and highly regarded by everyone in that community of Benambra, including Labor-voting people such as my parents and grandparents.

We are of course debating a very important bill today, the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. We are proud to be introducing this landmark legislation. The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 implements a key commitment of the Labor government in its response to IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman's Operation Watts special report. The government supported all 21 recommendations and made three additional commitments to addressing parliamentary workplace standards. I am not going to detail the bill here because that would not be appropriate, except to say that the process for the development of the bill, I think it is agreed across the chamber, has been a good one. There has been a lot of consultation, including with the opposition. It is an important bill to get right, and I know that a lot of work has gone into ensuring that we, through this bill, meet the expectations of the Victorian community in terms of the standards of behaviour that are set by this house that we all agree to abide by and, importantly, that we ensure protections are in place for our staff in relation to the behaviours of those of us that hold power in this place. That, I am sure, will be an interesting debate.

We will also be debating the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024. Our government is enormously proud of our ongoing commitment to delivering a strong community and women's safety agenda, and we are the leading state in the nation when it comes to the prevention of family violence and the focus on women's safety. I think everyone is well aware that we have implemented all 227 recommendations from the royal commission, and I mention all of that because of course the bill that is to be debated includes two reforms targeting women's safety – complete defence from defamation over reports made to police and extending digitally recorded evidence in family violence – and the bill seeks to make a number of other amendments.

Finally, there is ample time for everyone in this place to get up on their feet and talk about the way in which the Allan Labor government budget 2024–25 is delivering for the people of Victoria and in fact delivering an \$8.8 billion investment into hospitals – a record investment – as part of a \$13 billion overarching investment into our healthcare system. Again, the budget take-note motion is one that those on the other side make a lot of noise about, whether they will have an opportunity to speak on the budget or not. Well, that opportunity is now, so we look forward to you all getting up in this place and delivering on that budget and being cognisant of course of the many benefits it delivers to the people of Victoria.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:52): I will start on a positive note by just letting members know that this is an important week. Around the building there has been an important show of bipartisanship in relation to Footy for Climate being in the building. The Minister for Environment and I as shadow

have brought in Footy for Climate, an important organisation which is part of the AFL, to talk about climate. It is a bipartisan event. I want to give a shout-out to Tom Campbell from Footy for Climate and Stephanie McKew from Environmental Leadership Australia, and also the CEO of the AFL Andrew Dillon will be here tomorrow evening for an event, which will be fantastic. Members will be able to hold both the women's and men's premiership cups and have photos with a number of significant footy players if they are interested.

I thought I would start on that positive note before saying the coalition will not be supporting the government on the government business program, and I can hear the shock from their side. The government and I had a discussion about providing an opportunity for the Shadow Attorney-General to debate one of the bills in consideration in detail, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024. It did not surprise me to hear that the government did not feel that the ministers were capable of debating him and giving him that opportunity, so no time has been provided. He is an outstanding Shadow Attorney who will make a fantastic Attorney, so I can understand why the government was fearful of allowing him that opportunity. On that basis, and on the basis that we have not had the opportunity to properly scrutinise many bills in that way – once this term with one particular bill, and one of the Nats often says to me that in their time they have only seen it happen twice in this place – it would be good if the government felt that their ministers were able to take bills into consideration, which unfortunately they cannot. In the last sitting week the government on the Thursday thought they would pull a little stunt and bring on a motion, which did end up quite lame in terms of their attempt to play politics and waste the Parliament's time, and I hope that this week we do not see any stunts from the government on motions.

I would note the Leader of the House spoke about the budget bills and the take-note motion on the budget. I can assure the Leader of the House that our members want to speak on these issues, and I would say that when the take-note motion was moved the government took the unprecedented step of stopping anyone who had spoken on the original bills from speaking on the take-note motion. So I would say to the government: you would have our support entirely in allowing every member who spoke on the original bills to speak again, because we all have so much to say. I put that ball in the government's court and ask them to consider revising that order so that anyone who did speak on the budget bills can speak a second time on the take-note motion, because historically that is what has always happened. We all assumed that would be the case, and unfortunately that has not been the case.

So I just reiterate for the Leader of the House and the Premier that if the government was serious about providing every member the opportunity, they would amend that motion, which prohibits us – people like me – from speaking a second time. I would love to speak about the budget a second time, but unfortunately I am gagged from doing so, and I know that many members –

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** That is right – gagged government members. The government members agree with me. It is a gag, I know, and I know I have been speaking up on the government members' behalf to find all of you more time to speak on the budget, because the Leader of the House was not going to provide it. So I am very glad that government members have thanked me for providing them more time this week to speak on the budget. I put that ball in their court to provide all of us an opportunity – some of us a second time – to speak on it, but because of those reasons, we will not be supporting the government business program. They should have allowed the Shadow Attorney-General an opportunity to take it into consideration.

**Ella GEORGE (Lara) (13:57):** It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on the government business program, and what a business program it is. It was refreshing to hear the member for Brighton start on a positive note, and I for one hope we see that positivity continue throughout the week.

Of course we have heard this morning from many members in this place tributes to Lou Lieberman MP, former member for Benambra, and I too wish to share my condolences with his family. I never

had the opportunity to meet him, but it was incredibly moving to hear the many tributes this morning from the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Nationals and of course the member for Benambra. It is certain that he has had a remarkable impact on this state and on his community, and I offer my condolences to the family of Lou Lieberman MP.

We have a number of pieces of legislation on the government business program this week. Later today I believe we will be commencing debate on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024, an important piece of legislation, and I note that the manager of government business in the house noted that this was an integral election commitment that the Allan Labor government made. This is a great piece of legislation that looks to modernise our Parliament and our workplace, because we know that every worker deserves to feel safe and protected in their workplace, and this legislation will do everything to strengthen our workplace and ensure that every person is protected. As I said, it is a commitment of this Labor government, and we follow through on our commitments.

Later during the week will also be debating the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024, again delivering important reforms that will support the effective operation of Victoria's justice system and integrity systems. Having previously worked in the criminal justice system prior to become a member in this place, having worked in magistrates' courts, I understand the importance of effective justice systems, and part of that is being able to appropriately share data, insights and learnings across courts and other elements of the justice system. This legislation will enable exactly that, with greater data sharing between courts and Victoria's chief statistician – incredibly important work to be doing.

We will also be returning to the take-note motion on the budget papers. I for one do not feel gagged about my opportunity to have my say about the state budget this year and the incredible outcomes for my community of Lara. I have got 15 minutes to speak on the budget take-note motion, and I will be using every single minute.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Members*

#### **Minister for Planning**

#### *Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): I rise to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today and for the rest of this week the Minister for Creative Industries will answer questions for the portfolios of planning and suburbs.

**The SPEAKER:** Before we commence question time, I wish to acknowledge a delegation from the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, led by the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, the Speaker of the Parliament, who are visiting the Victorian Parliament this week. I welcome the delegation to the house.

### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

#### **John Setka**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Union thug and CFMEU boss John Setka is threatening the AFL with building cost blowouts unless it sacks its umpiring boss. He has published a mugshot of the umpiring boss on a 'Wanted dead or alive' poster. When will the Premier show leadership and call out the unacceptable behaviour of militant union thug and CFMEU boss John Setka?

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I am struggling to see how this relates to government business. Would you like to rephrase your question?

**John PESUTTO:** With respect, Speaker, the Premier has been asked about this matter repeatedly in recent days and has refused to address the issue. This is a government that talks a big game –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The house will come to order. I invite the Leader of the Opposition to rephrase the question. If the Leader of the Opposition chooses not to rephrase the question, I will rule the question out of order.

**John PESUTTO:** Union thug and CFMEU boss John Setka is threatening the AFL with building cost blowouts on taxpayer-funded projects unless it sacks its umpiring boss. He has published a mugshot of the umpiring boss on a ‘Wanted dead or alive’ poster. He has posted that on a ‘Dead or alive’ poster. The poster says ‘Not wanted dead or alive. Reward’. That is what the poster says. The Premier has been asked about this matter in recent days. She has refused to address the impact of that violent behaviour and that violent language and the cost blowouts for Victorian taxpayers. She has refused as Premier, as head of government, to address that. I call on her to show leadership and say when she will call out the unacceptable behaviour of militant union thug John Setka.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you uphold your original ruling in relation to this rant that we have just witnessed – deranged rant – from the Leader of the Opposition. This is question time, and I ask that you ask him to respect the conventions of the house as well as your ruling.

**James Newbury:** On the point of order, Speaker, the question quite clearly went to taxpayer-funded projects, and every Victorian has a right to have an answer to this question. What we are seeing now is an outrageous Labor protection racket.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Manager of Opposition Business knows that is not the way to raise a point of order. I will allow the question. It is very tenuous, the link to government business, but I will allow the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): I was indeed asked about this matter at a press conference on Sunday morning, where we were releasing details of our draft housing targets for every local government area across the state where we are focused on building more homes for more Victorians. As I said, I was indeed asked about this question. I made the observation on Sunday – and I repeat that today – that everyone deserves the right to a safe and respectful workplace. It does not matter whether you are on a construction site or whether you work at AFL House or indeed here on the floor of the Parliament. I suggest to the Leader of the Opposition, if he is focused on men’s behaviour change, that he might want to start looking at himself.

**John Pesutto:** I ask the Premier to withdraw that comment.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier to withdraw.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I withdraw.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Were John Setka’s comments appropriate?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, in an earlier ruling on the first question you ruled that the Leader of the Opposition needed to direct his questions to matters of government business, and I see no connection in the supplementary question to any matter of government business. Therefore I ask that you rule the supplementary question out of order.

**James Newbury:** On the point of order, Speaker, the first question related to John Setka’s comments and the supplementary asked whether or not those comments, which were referred to and ruled in order, were appropriate.

**The SPEAKER:** I rule on this supplementary question not on the basis that it did or did not relate to the primary question but because questions should not seek an opinion, particularly a legal opinion; ask whether press statements are correct; seek a solution to a hypothetical proposition; be trivial, vague or meaningless; raise matters sub judice; anticipate debate on an order of the day; or raise questions of policy too large to be dealt with in an answer to a question. I therefore rule the supplementary question out of order.

**John Pesutto:** On a point of order, Speaker, on behalf of the opposition, I just want to register that we respectfully and strongly disagree with that finding.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! If members have concerns about my rulings, they are welcome to come and see me after question time in my office.

#### **Ministers statements: rental reform**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:09): I am happy to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is providing real cost-of-living relief for renters, with new rental minimum standards announced last week by the Minister for Consumer Affairs and me. One in three Victorians are renters, and we know that many face high energy costs due to poorly insulated homes with old, inefficient energy appliances. Our new standards will make rental homes more energy efficient by ensuring end-of-life appliances are replaced with energy-efficient electric alternatives and that homes are insulated and draught proofed so heating and cooling are more effective.

The new insulation and weatherproofing standards will help slash household energy bills by up to \$567 each and every year. An efficient heat pump hot-water system will save renters a further \$220 every year, and with better 3-star cooling another \$215 will be saved. That is savings of \$1040 each and every year on energy bills, and these new standards will make sure that money goes back in the pockets of those renters who are doing it tough. There are benefits for rental providers as well. Improving the efficiency of the property will increase its value and will help keep renters staying longer in those properties.

We are also helping renters access cheap renewable energy with our solar PV rebates for rental properties, with more than 5000 rental properties installing solar thanks to our rebates. The members for Werribee, Point Cook and Tarneit will be thrilled that their communities have had the highest numbers of renters receiving the benefits of solar in this state. And in 2024–25 we are doubling the number of solar rebates for rental properties. The Allan Labor government are backing in Victorians – not the big end of town, the big energy companies. We know that it is about fairness, and everyone deserves to live comfortably in their home.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, as a point of clarification, on your earlier ruling you started by saying that whether or not there was a link between the primary and the supplementary question did not relate to your ruling. I would seek your guidance as to how this chamber can operate in relation to relevance on the primary and supplementary wherein in that instance a ruling was given on the primary question that the question was in order and the supplementary clearly related to the primary question. Therefore it is very difficult for the chamber if one is ruled in and one is ruled out.

**The SPEAKER:** I have made my ruling, Manager of Opposition Business, and reiterate that you are welcome to come and speak to me in my office after question time for clarification.

**John Pesutto:** On the point of order, Speaker, in relation to my question, the Premier in her answer stated that every worker in this state deserves to be able to go to work and work in a safe workplace. In light of the Premier's own wording, I then framed a supplementary question to ask her whether Mr Setka's comments were appropriate, having regard to what the Premier herself had said. So I ask,



by way of clarification: how can what the Premier said in the substantive answer not then found the question and support the question I posed in my supplementary?

**The SPEAKER:** I reiterate my answer in relation to this matter that you are welcome to come and speak to me about my ruling in my office after question time. There are other ways of raising matters of dissent in this house, including through motions, that are open to the opposition to follow through with.

### Youth crime

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:13): My question is to the Premier. Last year alone, 2770 youths breached their bail conditions – a rate of one every 3 hours. One 14-year-old had 388 charges laid, his alleged crimes including six burglaries in 6 hours, stealing a woman's car at knifepoint, breaking into a home with a baby inside and a smash-and-grab with a sledgehammer. Premier, why are vulnerable Victorians paying the price for Labor's failure to manage this state's youth crime crisis?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): I thank the member for Malvern for his question, and firstly, at the outset, can I acknowledge that for anyone who has been a victim of crime I can understand deeply their distress as a result of being a victim of crime. That is why today, as we have announced this morning with the Minister for Youth Justice, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police, the new Youth Justice Bill that we will be introducing to the Parliament includes for the first time new sentencing principles that have a recognition of the impact of the crime on victims and also the introduction of a new youth justice victims register. It is indeed recognising that the impact on victims, regardless of the age of the person who perpetrated the crime, absolutely does need to be recognised in considering the sentencing requirements of that crime.

Can I also, though, go on to say that the member is not accurately representing the true nature of what is going on here in Victoria. Victoria has one of the lowest rates of youth offending –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to draw the Premier back to the question. This down talking of crime is very offensive to victims in the community.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I was merely using the opportunity to correct some of the claims the member made. Victoria has one of the lowest youth crime rates in Australia. It is lower than New South Wales. However, as the government has acknowledged on a number of occasions, we are seeing in terms of the rates of youth offending that we have a smaller cohort of younger people who are engaging in repeat offending behaviour, and that is why –

**Michael O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is not just debating the question; she is gaslighting Victorians.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** That is why with the introduction of a new Youth Justice Bill we are firmly focused on taking strong action against that repeat behaviour, whether it is through mandatory diversion requirements, which I think are something that the opposition may have also called for, or indeed the introduction of electronic monitoring to ensure that young people do comply with their bail requirements. Also, this new Youth Justice Act is absolutely designed to ensure community safety is front and centre, which is why there are those requirements around the impact on victims that I spoke to earlier.

I would hope that given the complexity and the seriousness of this nature the opposition can find a way to support the reforms we are introducing, because it does go to our focus on how we can reduce offending and strengthen community safety but also importantly divert young offenders at the lower levels away from a life of crime, because the evidence tells us that is what best protects community safety.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (14:18): Crime is increasing across Victoria, with decade-high increases in violent and youth crime. Will the Premier confirm that nearly 50 per cent of all crimes are now going unsolved in Victoria at the same time as the government has cut support to Victoria Police?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): I will not confirm numbers that are thrown across this chamber by the member for Malvern. I would hope, given the history of the member for Malvern in this policy space, that he would come to this debate with a more mature outlook on how we can work together to address rates of youth offending. What I can say to the member for Malvern is that we have invested \$4.6 billion and provided 3600 extra Victoria Police, and the academy is full in terms of new graduates coming through the system. The Youth Justice Bill we have introduced today will strengthen the tools and the resources Victoria Police have to deal with youth offending and also –

**Michael O'Brien**: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. In this last budget the Premier has cut funding to the courts and crime prevention.

**The SPEAKER**: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: Indeed. We acknowledge this is a critically important area of policy, which is why the work is being done. The bill will be before the Parliament this week, and we hope the opposition can find their way to supporting it.

#### **Ministers statements: rental reform**

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:20): I rise to update the house on the work that the Allan Labor government are doing to make rental homes safer for Victorian families. We know that more Victorians are renting than ever before, and while we have the strongest rental protections in the country, we also know that there is more that we can do. That is why earlier this month I was very proud to stand with my good friend the Minister for Energy and Resources to launch consultation for the proposed new minimum energy efficiency and safety standards. The minister just updated the house about how these standards would make rentals more comfortable, how they would reduce emissions and slash power bills for renters, and a number of other things, but what I am here to talk about today is how these new standards will also make rental homes safer for children.

These proposed changes will mean that every single rental home across Victoria will need to have blind cord anchors installed to prevent the tragic death of children as a consequence of strangulation. There will be no exceptions to this standard, and rightly so, because in Victoria children's safety is non-negotiable and blind cord anchors are a very simple solution that, quite frankly, saves lives. Victorians can already access free blind cord safety kits from Consumer Affairs Victoria, and under our 2021 rental reforms, renters do not actually need to seek permission from their rental provider to install these life-saving devices. These changes will be backed in by our new renting taskforce, which will crack down on dodgy rentals, enforcing compliance with minimum standards, as well as ensuring that rental providers advertise accurately, and our new online reporting form will allow prospective renters to easily report potential breaches directly to Consumer Affairs Victoria. On this side of the house we are committed to keeping renters safe, and we have a strong track record to that end.

#### **Health services**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:22): My question is to the Minister for Health. A member of a regional Victorian hospital board has said that Labor's large-scale hospital cuts will have a 'devastating impact on the services of small regional hospitals'. Why do vulnerable and sick Victorians have to pay the price because Labor cannot manage money?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:22): I welcome the question from the member

for Lowan because it gives me the opportunity to put on the record some facts in relation to healthcare funding in this state. Our last budget delivered \$13 million for health care –

**A member** interjected.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** \$13 billion, the Treasurer has corrected me – of which \$8.8 billion is being expended directly in our hospitals. This includes \$1.5 billion for this financial year and an additional \$1.8 billion in the coming financial year. Right now my department is working with our health services, as it does every year, to negotiate their budgets – but not just their budgets, their activities and the care that they will deliver. Victorians rightly expect that when we invest almost 25 per cent of the state’s budget into our hospitals this money is focused on the delivery of patient care. We make no apologies for the fact that we are now transitioning back to where we were before the COVID pandemic, when we ensured that we negotiated ahead of the financial year the funding that would be made available and the care that would be delivered in return for that funding. Let me be clear again, because it seems that the member for Lowan finds it hard to understand that when in fact you invest in a year \$1.5 billion and then \$1.8 billion, that is extra money, extra funding, for more care in Victoria’s public hospitals.

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:24):** The creation of Grampians Health, which merged four health services, led to cuts to vital programs, including cancelling the Edenhope dental service and cutting Horsham’s community rehabilitation exercise programs. Why should the community trust the minister when she states there will be no cuts or amalgamations?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:25):** Once again I welcome this question from the member for Lowan because again it is an opportunity to put some facts on the table. Frankly, I am not going to take lectures from those who when they were in government closed hospitals at Eildon, Koroit, Mortlake, Murtoa, Red Cliffs, Macarthur, Clunes, Beeac, Birregurra, Lismore, Elmore –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister’s response is not a time to attack the opposition. I ask the minister to come back to explaining how we can trust her when the first thing that she did was cancel dental services at the Edenhope hospital.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Lowan! I ask the minister to come back to the question that was asked.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** The voluntary merger that occurred at Grampians Health has expanded access to health care for the people of that region, including expanded maternity care, a haematology clinic in Horsham and for the first time a medical officer at Stawell, meaning that the people of Stawell can now access medical care when and where they need it.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Euroa can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Euroa withdrew from chamber.**

**Ministers statements: housing**

**Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:26):** I am pleased to update the house on the stellar success of the Victorian Homebuyer Fund. Those opposite of course are more focused on court cases or other distractions, but the Victorian Homebuyer Fund is delivering for Victorians in very tangible ways, getting Victorians who otherwise would not be able to into a home of their own. For example, it is the Allan Labor government shared equity scheme – a nation leader and an innovative policy – that is making it easier for Victorians to enter home ownership. This scheme operates such that if you have a 5 per cent deposit the VHF will contribute up to 25 per cent of the purchase price in exchange for the state taking an equivalent equity

share in the property. This nation-leading reform has got thousands of young Victorians into home ownership by reducing their mortgage and removing the need for costly lenders mortgage insurance.

Just this week the number of Victorian households who have bought a home thanks to the VHF reached 10,000, with more than \$2.1 billion invested by the Victorian government into the wellbeing and home ownership of Victorians who would otherwise struggle. This is 10,000 households now who would likely otherwise have not been able to enter the market who are now in their very own homes. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then I am flattered that this scheme is now being copied by the federal government and being gifted to the nation. We stand ready to work in cooperation with federal Labor as they roll out our scheme to the nation. This is of course in addition to other supports for first home buyers that this government has put in place, including of course first home buyer stamp duty relief.

### Energy policy

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:28): My question is to the minister for energy and climate action. Two weeks ago the state Labor government signed off on a permit for Beach Energy to drill for and extract gas under the ocean right near the Twelve Apostles. This permit says Beach Energy can start extracting gas in just 12 days time, just a few kilometres from the Twelve Apostles. Labor approved this permit against the wishes of First Nations sea country custodians and the local community. Scientists tell us that to have any chance of avoiding the worst impacts of climate change every drop of fossil fuels must stay in the ground. Why is Labor approving more fossil gas drilling when we are in a climate emergency?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:30): I thank the member for the question. I think scientists would also agree that you actually need to have a concrete plan to reduce emissions and absolutely use the evidence. The facts are very clear. In this state we are leading the country in terms of decarbonising our economy, reducing our emissions and doing it in a way that takes communities with us. We are absolutely committed to achieving every single target that we have set in terms of emissions reductions, notwithstanding any particular part of the equation that you want to pick on or focus on to say, 'If you don't do X over here, it means that you're not serious about anything.' I would also contend that scientists would look at the people who are actually delivering the outcomes and delivering the evidence-based programs to reduce our emissions and would report on the fact that the Victorian government is absolutely leading not just in Victoria but the rest of the country when it comes to real action, not words, to reduce our emissions. We have made a clear commitment that we are reducing our emissions –

**Sam Hibbins**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was about the state government's approval of a specific gas project. The minister is not being relevant and has not in her answer even mentioned the word 'gas', so I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the actual question, which was about a specific gas project.

**The SPEAKER**: The minister was being relevant to the question, which had a long preamble.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO**: While some may have come very late to the piece about the need to decarbonise our gas system, we have been talking about it and doing something about it for a number of years now. Victoria is leading the country in terms of our *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, which articulates annually real actions and real programs to deliver on our commitment to phasing out our reliance on fossil gas in this state. You cannot do it without a plan. If you do not have a plan, all you have got is a disaster. Perhaps the word 'disaster' in some people's language could be the equivalent of the Greens party or indeed could be the equivalent of the opposition in terms of no plans other than a lot of talk and no action. The fact is this: if you want to be reckless about this, you will have no plan. You will ignore the science, like some opposite will do, or others indeed would have you turn off heating in the winter and cooling in the summer because there is no plan to work on the substitutes

that will keep people warm in the winter and keep people cool in the summer and actually reduce our emissions as we do it. That is called a plan.

We are not into disasters on this side of the house. Those opposite might be in for disasters. Let the record show who indeed is actually delivering real action on climate, because it is certainly no-one on the other side, whether they are on the crossbench or those directly opposite here. I would contend that we will still be here in a number of years time continuing to deliver on real action while those opposite simply talk about it.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:33): The minister says that she is not into disaster, but Labor's plan to approve more gas drilling is a climate disaster. The Twelve Apostles project is just one of dozens of coal and gas projects on the cards across Victoria. Today we have a delegation in the chamber from just one of the many Pacific island nations who are on the front lines of climate impacts right now, contributed to by what we do in terms of our burning of fossil fuels. Minister, does your government accept that gas is a fossil fuel that is causing climate change?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:34): I thank the member for the supplementary question, but I do not think she listened to my answer to the substantive question, which actually talked about fossil gas. I am very clear about this. There is nothing shameful here that you are trying to catch us out on, can I warn you really clearly. And for those who are in any doubt, you actually need to do something about this rather than talk about it. Do something about it, when in fact we could have –

**Jacinta Allan**: Who blocked the CPRS?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO**: Thank you, Premier. In fact we have lost a good 15 years on national action because some would like to be purer than others. We have lost 15 years of real climate action because of a failure of the Greens political party to actually pull their finger out. Shame on you. Do not talk to me about Pacific Islander communities. Do not talk to me about that, because the fact is this government will deliver on all of our commitments – *(Time expired)*

#### **Ministers statements: housing**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:35): I rise today to update the house on this government's plans for more housing across our local government areas. To create more homes and to give industry the confidence they need to get on and build, we need government and all councils working together to the same goal, and that is more houses for Victorians. Victorian councils are often on the front lines of our community, whether it be during emergency responses we have seen so often in the past couple of years or delivering the services that their communities need.

And housing is no different. We are working in partnership with councils to build more homes and keep communities together. The starting point is to look for places where more homes can be built and at the types of homes that we need to suit Victorians in all kinds of places, and councils are uniquely placed to provide this insight. Our councils have the powers to unlock space for more homes by proposing changes to local planning rules.

Across Victoria I have sat down with councils and I have heard the same desire, which is for social cohesion. What that looks like is young people accessing housing where they grew up. It looks like empty-nesters being able to downsize in their own communities. The members for Bundoora, Mordialloc, Bentleigh and Oakleigh, to name a few, know that in their communities teenagers are moving away from their families and friends because of lack of affordable housing. Even in my own LGA, Hobsons Bay, where there is so much new housing on the go, we know that there is more we can do to keep our communities together.

We know that there is a housing affordability crisis, and it will require both the state government and councils to work together to unlock more housing supply. There is no more important issue for Victorians than housing affordability, housing choice and having a place to call home, a place of comfort and a place of pride. We are doing everything we can to pull all the levers available to ensure that Victorians have the best opportunity.

### Home building industry

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:37): My question is for the Assistant Treasurer. With over 700 domestic building insurance claims unresolved for more than a year, how much longer will Victorian families have to wait for fair compensation from the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:38): I thank the member for his question. I think at the outset it is worthwhile just understanding that we are in this position because of some of the most egregious and deeply offensive behaviour perpetrated by corporate Australia I think the nation has ever seen. You have had instances where you had developers –

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Danny PEARSON**: It is interesting, the interjection from the Leader of the Opposition. You never, ever attack –

**The SPEAKER**: Order! Through the Chair. Leader of the Opposition, I ask you to desist. I would like you to desist from interjecting.

**Danny PEARSON**: Speaker, the Liberal Party have never once in this place come in and attacked the awful behaviour of some of the builders –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, this is an important question on behalf of many genuine victims, and I would ask the minister to come to the question and deal with the substance of the question.

**The SPEAKER**: The Assistant Treasurer will come back to the question.

**Danny PEARSON**: The issue here is that the Porter Davis collapse was the single biggest collapse of a builder in the state's history, and that has had a profound impact in relation to the VMIA's ability to respond because of what can only be described as egregious behaviour by rogue developers who took tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of dollars of money from hardworking Victorians and failed to take out an insurance policy. That is why we are in this situation.

The issue here is, in relation to the specific question that the member asked, that in the 2022–23 financial year – and that was the most recent tabled annual report – 97 per cent of deposit-only claims had an offer made within two months, 87 per cent of incomplete work claims had an offer made within six months after receiving appropriate documentation, with the rest made within 12 months, and 97 per cent of defect claims had an offer within 12 months. One of the challenges here that we are dealing with is that from the VMIA's perspective they have to establish whether a person has got a –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, with respect, the minister is referring to old data, not the question, which related to 700 victims whose claims remain unresolved.

**The SPEAKER**: The Assistant Treasurer was being relevant to the question.

**Danny PEARSON**: In the case where you have got an instance like Porter Davis, where you have egregious behaviour where an insurance policy has not been taken out, the VMIA needs to establish a relationship with the individuals involved. You then have to turn around and you have to go out and do an assessment in terms of the status of the build. You then have to try and do the analysis and work out what the right way and the best way forward is. The issue here is that we have had to deal with

appalling behaviour. We have had to deal with an event that the VMIA has never experienced before in terms of the size and scale and scope.

What I would say to every one of the individuals involved is I am deeply saddened that they find themselves in this situation because of what can only be described as egregious and deeply offensive behaviour. The VMIA is working tirelessly to try and deal with these issues, and what I would say is on this side of the house we stand on the side of hardworking Victorians and consumers in relation to these issues.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:41): Why has the Assistant Treasurer allowed the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority to drag out the claims process, resulting in families bearing thousands in out-of-pocket expenses due to rising building costs?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:42): Again, we are in this situation because of dodgy builders. Dodgy building companies have done the wrong thing, and that is why this has happened. In relation to these matters, the VMIA assesses each and every one of these claims, as is appropriate, and it is my expectation that the VMIA deals with these matters as quickly and as properly and as appropriately as it can. But again, as I have said, where you have got instances where there is no relationship between the VMIA and the customers because these dodgy developers have failed to take out an insurance policy, this is why –

*Members interjecting.*

**Danny PEARSON**: Look, you can defend your spivs in the property sector. You can defend these people. On this side of the house we stand on the side of consumers, and that is why we are working tirelessly every day to make sure we deal with these matters appropriately.

#### **Ministers statements: housing**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:43): I am very pleased to update the house on the work that our government is doing to build more homes for more Victorians. We want every young person to have the choice of living in the community they love – a home close to where they grew up, perhaps near Mum and Dad, great local schools, hospitals, jobs, green space and public transport. That is why on Sunday, as part of our housing statement and plan for Victoria work, we released new draft housing targets that look to the next 30 years of where these homes are going to be built. The same principles apply to these targets – access to jobs, services and public transport. That is why these targets are different from municipality to municipality. In Boroondara, for example, a great established community, it would mean 67,000 more homes over the next 30 years. In comparison to Wyndham, though, who have seen significant growth over that 30-year period of time, we would see more homes being accommodated in the Boroondara area to allow some of the pressure in Wyndham to be eased.

Just a word of caution, though, for anyone who might want to move into Boroondara, say, in the community of Hawthorn: you might just want to do your due diligence and check out who the neighbours are, because there is one NIMBY in that local community who is trying to keep everyone else away – a bit of a nosy parker going around telling people where they can and cannot live, saying that more people should go out to the outer suburbs, someone who has actively campaigned against height and density in the inner east going to the point of asking people to actively defend against young people moving in. You have got to wonder: does this individual prefer to live next to a nuclear reactor than a young family of four? We are focused on getting more homes built for more Victorians and giving people the dignity of being able to have a roof over their heads.

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

**Bridget Vallence**: On a point of order, Speaker, there are yet again a number of questions and adjournments that have been unanswered so far and are overdue, and I would appreciate them being followed up, please. I have raised these points of order many times. The first is question 535 to the

Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, an adjournment matter. Constituency question 592 for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure remains unanswered. An adjournment, 655, to the Minister for Children remains unanswered. There are a raft of questions for the Minister for Skills and TAFE: questions on notice 1050, 1052, 1081 and 1083. Question 1112 is for the Minister for Education. For the Attorney-General there is question on notice 1134. More questions on notice are for the Minister for Skills and TAFE: 1135, 1136, 1137, 1138, 1139, 1140, 1141, 1148, 1149, 1150, 1151, 1152 and 1190. And there is a question on notice for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety: 1133. These are all overdue. I think I have raised points of order a number of times, and I would really appreciate these being answered.

**The SPEAKER:** Would you hand the list to the clerks, please, member for Evelyn.

*Constituency questions*

**Berwick electorate**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (14:47): (680) My constituency question is for the Premier, and I ask for the information she has about the expectations of her ministers responding to serious issues raised by me on behalf of the constituents of Berwick. It is becoming the norm for more than eight weeks to pass before we get even an acknowledgement that the ministers have received our inquiries. The worst offenders are the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, the Minister for Energy and Resources, the Minister for Public and Active Transport, the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Education. Included in these are one with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety which took them over a month to respond to. They have handballed it to another minister. There is also one about three households that have had major flood damage due to the works going on under the Level Crossing Removal Project. My office was informed on 3 April that this was handed to another minister, and since then we have failed to get anything back, leaving these families in the dark. I know for a fact that when Labor MPs write to a minister, the responses come back far, far quicker. We would expect the same for my constituents in Berwick.

**Lara electorate**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (14:48): (681) My question is for the Minister for Children, and I ask: how will the brand new Barwon Early Parenting Centre in North Geelong help families in the electorate of Lara and the wider Geelong community? It was an honour to officially open the new early parenting centre last week with my colleagues the member for Bellarine and the member for Geelong. This new facility is the eighth early parenting centre to open in Victoria – it will increase to 13 centres in the future – and it will be a great resource for families who need a little bit of extra help as they welcome children into their families. It is so important because, as we all know, no two journeys towards motherhood and raising children are ever the same. Special thanks to all those at Barwon Health who have worked hard to deliver this facility. It will make such a big difference to local families. Again I ask the minister: how will the brand new Barwon Early Parenting Centre in North Geelong help families in the electorate of Lara and the wider Geelong community?

**Mildura electorate**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:49): (682) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Has the minister considered the impact that the lifting of the wild dog non-protection orders in the state's north-west is having on the endangered malleefowl, and has he considered how it might be protected? In March under the wild dog program the non-protection orders for wild dogs were lifted in only the north-west of the state. This has resulted in many lambs during lambing season being taken by wild dogs. And let us not be mistaken: they are not native animals, they are not dingoes; they are feral dogs who hunt for sport. Sometimes they do not even kill these little lambs, they just maul them and leave them for dead, which is awful. But what is not being spoken about is that the north-west of this state is where the malleefowl lives, and many people are asking me why the Minister for Environment hates the malleefowl.



**Northcote electorate**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (14:50): (683) My question is to the Attorney-General in the other place, and I ask: what is the most recent information on the anti-vilification reforms being undertaken by the Victorian government? These reforms intend to strengthen protections for Victorians against discrimination and hate speech and ensure there are responsive criminal and civil legal avenues to address the harm caused by vilification. Many in my community have spoken to me about their concern over the rising rates of extremist activity in Victoria and Australia, often exacerbated by divisive political rhetoric and even spurred by militant elements from abroad. Others have relayed worrying reports of hate speech and language which incites violence in the community specifically targeting a range of Victorians on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexuality and other attributes. Hate speech has no place in our community, and everyone has the right to feel safe and respected in the place they call home. I look forward to hearing from the Attorney-General about our reforms as we look to uphold people's right to freedom of speech, protect our communities from vilification and violence and promote inclusivity and respect for peace in our democratic institutions.

**South-West Coast electorate**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:51): (684) My question is to the Minister for Health, and my question is: when can the South-West Coast community expect the promised PET scanner to be installed and fully operational in Warrnambool? In the lead-up to the 2022 election the Labor government pledged \$44 million to deliver eight new PET scanners across Victoria, including one for South West Healthcare in Warrnambool. It is now mid-2024, and the hospital still lacks this promised equipment. Several people have told me they are having to make gruelling trips to Geelong for PET scans, which is impacting patient care and adding to the stress of what is already a difficult time for members of our community. South West Healthcare is already impacted by the hospital redevelopment being in a state of flux due to the lack of funding because of government mismanagement. The community have no faith that the government will deliver on its promised new PET scanner sometime soon.

**Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:52): (685) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs regarding prospective renters' concerns for rental properties on the market. Minister, how is the Allan Labor government supporting prospective renters who have concerns for the advertising and standards of available rental properties in my electorate of Narre Warren South? We all know that there is a tight squeeze on the rental market as vacancies and availability are currently in short supply. Many people do want to live in Melbourne and in this great state. I have been contacted by many constituents recently who are struggling to keep up with rising rents and trying very hard to find an affordable and livable home for their family. Prospective renters need to be protected from inaccurate advertising and properties that do not meet the minimum standards, as was announced in our housing statement. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

**Richmond electorate**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:53): (686) My question is for the Minister for Climate Action. There is no question about it: gas is a dirty fossil fuel, the burning and extraction of which will accelerate the climate crisis and destroy the environment. Yet two weeks ago this Victorian Labor government just approved the first new offshore gas project in Victoria in over a decade in Gunditjmarra sea country right near the Twelve Apostles, and there are a dozen more proposals in the pipeline. Labor is turning its back on the community, on First Nations groups and on the overwhelming scientific evidence telling us that to avoid catastrophic climate change we need to keep fossil fuels in the ground. What is the Minister for Climate Action doing if not stopping new fossil fuel projects from devastating our future?

**Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:54): (687) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. By lodging a complaint form on the Consumer Affairs Victoria website to report dodgy rentals, how will my constituents be supporting the work of the renting taskforce? This complaint form is part of our nation-leading reforms to ensure minimum standards are met and the rental market is fairer, because unfortunately it is far too common an experience for Victorians in the rental market to face unscrupulous actors. In a time when many in my electorate are feeling the pressures of rental stress I am proud that we are taking action to protect the rights of renters. We have stepped in to ban all types of rental bidding whilst restricting rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements, and we are delivering \$7.8 million in the rental stress support package to support tenants doing it tough. Actions speak louder than words. Unlike some in this chamber who seek to grandstand and play political games, we on this side are making the necessary changes to ensure we protect renters and tackle dodgy rentals.

**Rowville electorate**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (14:55): (688) My question is to the Minister for Education. When will the minister consider funding for public schools in the Rowville electorate and not just in marginal Labor seats? During the last state election, of the education commitments made by this Labor government, 70 per cent were made in Labor seats, and of the pitiful 28 per cent of commitments they made in Liberal seats, Labor has only delivered 41 per cent of that promised funding. Unsurprisingly, for Labor seats, they have already delivered 80 per cent of funding to their Labor electorates. Carrington Primary School in my electorate, like many other schools, was promised funding by Labor. It was promised \$13.7 million at the last election and yet, like so many other schools, has been left dumped in the planning stages. Labor has a mandate to deliver on election commitments, but it does not have a mandate to punish schools in the electorate of Rowville.

**Sunbury electorate**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:56): (689) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, what is the expected completion date of the new Sunbury community hospital in my electorate? As the minister knows well, the Sunbury community hospital is being delivered by upgrading and transforming the Sunbury Day Hospital into a fantastic new facility that will deliver a range of important everyday health services, including additional urgent care, dialysis and a range of other diagnostic services. Once complete, we know this project will take pressure off nearby hospitals, including Sunshine and the Northern, and will allow many within my electorate and surrounding areas to receive important health care close to home. We will continue to invest in local services within our local communities and of course make sure that we are providing those services as they continue to grow and thrive.

***Business of the house*****Program****Debate resumed.**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (14:57): I am very pleased to continue with my remarks today. Before the interruption and before question time, I was speaking about the take-note motion on the state budget. I would like to reiterate that I do not feel gagged. I have a full 15 minutes in which I am very pleased to be making a contribution about the benefits of this year's state budget to the electorate of Lara. But perhaps members on the other side will feel gagged later on this week when they have to get up on their feet and speak about the nuclear motion that is before this house. No doubt we will hear a cheer and a stanza or two from members opposite in support of the dangerous, superfluous nuclear energy policy, promoted by their federal leader, in beautiful parts of this state, like Anglesea. While those on the other side soliloquise on the merits of unsafe, dangerous nuclear energy, on this side we are getting on with delivering what Victorians really want. We are not pushing nuclear, we are investing in clean,

green, renewable energy. This week you will hear from government members in complete and total opposition to nuclear power in any place in this state and in any form in this state. I have seen the maps that show the impact of what will happen if there is a nuclear disaster in Anglesea, which has been proposed as a potential nuclear site.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, at the end of the day we are on the government business program, and I am not sure what this is.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Ella GEORGE:** I thank the member for Brighton for seeking some clarity. I was speaking about the nuclear power motion which will be debated in this place this week and as such is part of the government business program. Like I said, I have seen the maps that show the impact of a nuclear disaster in Anglesea. It would be devastating for my community and for the entire Geelong community, and I stand firmly against nuclear power. I look forward to making further contribution to debate in this place over the course of the week. I commend the government business program to the house.

**Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:59):** It does give me some pleasure to rise to speak about the government business program this week, although it seems like it is quite light on, which is why we are opposing the government business program. It seems that with the winter break looming – and I have heard the phrase ‘Winter is coming’ uttered a few times from the other side already today; winter is well and truly here – we are limping towards the finish line as far as government business goes.

I actually look forward to debating the nuclear motion later in the week and, rather than scare tactics, actually presenting some facts, because it is something that I do have quite a strong interest in – and not only that but other forms of energy, like hydrogen. This week I have spoken to some of the people involved in the hydrogen industry. I did not know there were so many colours involved in hydrogen, but there are. That is something interesting, so I look forward to that debate.

It is actually a pleasure to have had the 24 visitors from the Northern Mallee Leaders Program in the gallery earlier today. It was great to see them here in Parliament learning from and hearing from all sorts of speakers. In fact the Speaker is presenting to them. We had the Minister for Agriculture earlier.

**Emma Kealy** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM:** It would be. It certainly would be, but it is great to have them in Parliament today.

We will be debating the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024 – eventually; I mean, it is 3 o’clock – an omnibus bill, and this is one thing. I talk about going into consideration in detail often, and this is one of those. Omnibus bills should be considered in detail, shouldn’t they? Just giving that sort of respect by going through them one at a time would be good. With two bills being debated in this place, on the notice paper we have item 14, ‘Youth violence in the Sunraysia district’; wouldn’t that be better to debate? It is very topical at the moment. With the justice legislation announcements from the government, wouldn’t we be better served by actually solving some immediate problems like by debating youth violence, particularly the petition that I presented on 5 March? Wouldn’t time be better spent debating bills that actually can affect the day-to-day lives of not only people living in Mildura but all Victorians? We know this is affecting all Victorians.

If we talk about the other motions, we have got the take-note motion on the budget, and the member for Lara mentioned that she did not feel gagged. Well, I know that there are several members on our side that absolutely do feel gagged. They do not get to have another say on the budget, even though over the last few weeks extra little bits of detail have filtered through. So of course they want to have another go, and to say that we cannot now – of course they feel gagged. I do not think that it is right for others to say that we should not feel a certain way. I think that is kind of inappropriate. The take-note motion on the budget will be interesting because we do have a list of speakers, particularly from

the Nats, that are ready to go. But those that have already spoken on the budget would certainly like another crack at it, given the things that have come to light in the last few days.

With the amount of motions on the notice paper, clearly there are many, many issues and topics for members throughout the entire state that the government professes to govern for which need to be addressed. We are put in this place to do a job, and that is to represent our communities. Yes, we can ask questions and we can do things that way and get things on the notice paper, but until we can actually debate properly in this place, which is what we are elected to do, then of course we feel like we are not serving our communities in full, because the government will not let us. That is why we are opposing the government business program.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (15:04): I am not angry, I am just disappointed and sad that the opposition will not be supporting the government business program.

*Members interjecting.*

**Paul EDBROOKE**: You might need them later. But I am a bit confused about the reasons why, because we just heard that the government business program was a bit light on, but before that we heard that the opposition were not supporting the government business program because there was no consideration in detail for the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. I have got cause to question whether consideration in detail was actually requested by the opposition, because that certainly is not what I have heard. Those others over there might have emancipated themselves from reality, but certainly –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, just on relevance and to assist the house, it was done in writing, which the Leader of the House rang me to respond to.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: I am not sure that is a point of order. The member to continue on the government business program.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: Thank you for that. Just to explain the swooning on the steps this morning of people yarn bombing, which is a form of activism, it was actually the deafblind association. It is Deafblind Awareness Week next week. We hope everyone can become part of that. It is a good cause.

On with my sonnet, I guess. The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 is obviously a key piece of this government business program. Like everyone on this side of the house and hopefully many people on the opposite side of the house and on the crossbenches, I truly believe that everyone deserves a safe workplace. Everyone deserves a workplace where they can work in safety, they can work in harmony with people and they do not have to put up with bad behaviour. This Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill, I think, goes a long way to ensuring that people will have a safe workplace and people will have a reporting system. This is a workplace unlike any other, but still there are no excuses for not having that reporting mechanism in place. We have seen at a federal level how things have played out with the infamous inquiry up there. We certainly want to make sure we do our bit down here. We have also got the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024, which I know people on this side of the house are absolutely chomping at the bit to get into.

We have heard a little bit about the budget take-note motion and people being gagged. Certainly people on this side of the room are not saying they have been gagged at all. People on this side of the room are smart enough and intelligent enough to have one bite at the cherry and get what they need to say out on behalf of their community in the 15 minutes allocated, and they have done it very, very well.

I should note the member for Benambra too. He spoke very well on the condolence motion for Mr Lou Lieberman MP. It sounds like this former MP and minister lived a full life and did an incredible amount for his community, so it was very appropriate that the house noted that and sent our condolences to his family.

Can I just say that I have spoken on the budget take-note motion. Whether it be the sports clubs in Frankston, the hospital that is going ahead or the schools and car parks, I share a love of building my community. I know people on this side of the house do too, and they would want to speak on that. They are in strong agreement on this side of the house in voting through the government business program as it is without any alterations.

Those on the other side can self-soothe about nuclear energy and it not being harmful to our environment, but debating that in this house is something that I think we need to do. We need to have it on the table in black and white who supports various forms of energy. Nuclear energy is only 10 per cent of energy across our world, and there is a reason for that. I think it is very important that we take the time in this chamber to ensure that people's opinions can be heard, that people's opinions are heard in their communities and that people can rule out that they might be for nuclear energy in their community as well. I think it is very important to allow that time in this government business program. With that, I will leave my remarks there, but obviously I stand in strong support of the government business program this week.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (15:09): I am pleased to rise today to speak on the government business program. What I will say from the start is the condolence motion here today for the Honourable Lou Lieberman, spoken on by all the leaders in this chamber, was very respectful, and I think that is a great tribute to a gentleman who gave his service to Victoria and obviously a lot of years in the Victorian Parliament and the federal Parliament for his community up there in Benambra.

But we do oppose this government business program today because it is very light on – quite light on in fact. We have only got two bills to talk about, and I think everyone is just getting a little bit tired and a little bit puffed out. The member for Frankston is getting sad, so he obviously needs a packet of Tim Tams and some tissues just to brighten his day up. He needs a bit of a hug and a cuddle. He is waiting for that winter break. We have got some tissues for you here, do not worry, member for Frankston. I will give you a cuddle out the back later.

*Members interjecting.*

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Look, he is just upset.

*Members interjecting.*

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Stop it. We are a bit light on in the business program this week. There are only two bills the government actually want to debate. The member for Malvern did ask for consideration in detail on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill 2024, and I do not see why we will not do that. The last time we had a consideration in detail was on the WorkCover bill.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** And the only time. The minister sat there, and it was good for Victoria to have that consideration in detail. I will give that minister credit that he had the courage to do a consideration in detail. I do not know why the relevant minister here does not have the courage to do that consideration in detail, because then we would really get into the guts of the bill, get to debate it and get questions answered that we may not be entirely sure about. Also, for the minister points may be raised that they had not considered. So I think it is actually a very good idea, and I think the government should rethink doing the consideration in detail. I know the member for Malvern has put in an enormous amount of work on these bills. He had a file this thick on it; he has done an enormous amount of work.

We are looking forward to the take-note motion. A lot of us on this side of the chamber have not spoken on the budget yet. I am very much looking forward to speaking on the budget, as a lot of the budget affected my community and the underfunding of schools and hospitals in my community really does need to be discussed in this chamber so my community can maybe get some answers from

government, which I doubt very much they will. There are a lot of things in the budget that affect regional Victoria. We heard it from the Leader of the Nationals when he talked about investment in infrastructure, which is \$96 billion, and regional Victoria only got \$2 billion. I cannot wait to talk about that on the take-note motion.

The only two bills that are going to be debated this week are the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Bill. The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill is something that I am looking forward to debating, because I think this bill has probably come about because of the behaviour of the government. It is really that simple – you have had to introduce a bill to curb your behaviour. This government has been referred to IBAC more times than any previous government, and the recommendations that have come out of Operation Watts are why these bills are in here this week. I find it a little bit ironic that we are introducing bills to curb the government's behaviour. That is what these bills are about, and that is what they are going to be debated on later on in the week. So I do look forward to that. But there are other things we could be talking about in this chamber this week. I mean, we have a crisis in housing, we have a crisis in education and we have a crisis in health, and it would have been good to see some bills come in and to debate those this week as well.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*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, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, 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, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

**Victorian Auditor-General's Office**

*Performance audit*

**The SPEAKER (15:20):** I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the resolution regarding a budget variation for MartinJenkins to deliver the performance audit of the Auditor-General and Victorian Auditor-General's Office without amendment.

**Members statements**

**Land tax**

**Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:20):** I bring to the house's attention this afternoon the catastrophic effect this government's attack on property owners and land ownership is having in regional Victoria. In my electorate of Polwarth we have one of the first local government areas to encounter the state government's windfall gains tax, which is having a terrible impact on a series of small landowners who in the lead-up to last Christmas received bills in excess of \$250,000 unexpectedly and unwanted by the people. But worst of all, these people have no capacity to pay that. The government's solution is that they will do them a favour by allowing them to pay for it over the next 10 years. These landowners have no capacity to realise any value in their land whatsoever. In fact they were undertaking community service by allowing their land to be rezoned for the greater good of

the community in the long run but have found themselves out of pocket from this awful and unjust tax.

On top of that of course is the onslaught of land tax bills that have gone out right across regional Victoria to many, many property owners for the first time. In some cases landowners are finding themselves with \$2000, \$3000, \$4000 and \$5000 land tax bills, which they will have to pass on to tenants and renters. Low-income people in country towns are now having to pay up to \$100 a week extra in tax to help pay for this government's mistakes and inability to manage money.

#### **Ashwood High School**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (15:22): In our last episode, you may recall that I was talking about the great people down at Ashwood High and Dr Brett Moore down there. We had the Premier for a bit of a STEAM centre visit – and the new STEAM centre is looking awesome; I can still tell you that. But I did not get a chance to read out the names of the fantastic school captains, which was a little remiss of me, so I am going to fix that up. There is Emma Hew, school captain, and Miles Guy, also school captain. We have got vice-captains Amber Balmer and Noah Rostan, and Jason Suryanata is the international school captain if you do not mind. Then we have got a couple of middle school captains, Hannah Williams and Ameer Bux. They took us around, the Premier and me, to show us their new STEAM centre, which they are very proud of.

#### **Pinewood Primary School**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (15:23): In the last couple of weeks – talking about schools, as I am – it was a delight to welcome our Deputy Premier, the Minister for Education, down to Pinewood Primary School with my good friend the member for Glen Waverley to have a chat to their school captains. I will make sure I get those names in today: Samuel and Tiantian, who showed us around and showed us the new plans for the \$8.56 million gym and four extra classrooms that were in this year's budget. They are a little bit excited down there, because this is a school, as I have said before in this house, that has gone from about 300 kids 10 years ago to now 978. They have to have structured lunchtimes – two of them. I am going to run out of time again. (*Time expired*)

#### **Euroa electorate schools**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (15:24): I had the pleasure of visiting the EdSpace independent specialist school in Benalla recently alongside new principal Megan Shiner. EdSpace exists to provide family-centred support services for people with disabilities in regional Victoria, particularly in areas of health, education and research. Megan has hit the ground running in the role, advocating strongly for students across the region that need it most. The growth of this school speaks volumes to both its success and the critical local need for the service it provides, with enrolment nearly doubling year on year.

I also visited neighbouring businesses operated by Capability Building and EdSpace with former students Noah and Kendra: Benalla Dogs for Life grooming service, Wheelie Awesome bike repairs, EdSpace café and the Heart of Art Benalla exhibition space. Kendra and Noah spoke about their enthusiasm for work, skills to run a business and financial earnings through the EdSpace programs.

The benefits of the school are obvious for all to see, so it is a shame families of these students will likely be ineligible for the \$400 school saving bonus. These families are not immune to cost-of-living increases just because they are sending their children to an independent school, with many coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. At many of the region's low-fee independent schools, including in towns in my electorate, like Benalla, Heathcote, Euroa, Seymour and Kilmore, more than 50 per cent of students come from financially disadvantaged families. Despite this, only a small percentage of students will be eligible for the school saving bonus. Too many families have been unfairly excluded from this school saving bonus, and it is time all were given a fair go.

**Vietnamese–Australian Seniors Association of Victoria**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (15:25): I stand here today to recognise the Vietnamese–Australian Seniors Association of Victoria and the amazing work that they do in my community. VASA organises regular meetings and social activities to provide the Vietnamese senior community with the opportunity to socialise and build lifelong relationships. In a world where people are finding it harder and harder to build and maintain friendships, the work groups like VASA do is becoming more and more important. I would like to thank VASA for coming in today and joining me here in Parliament this morning. It was lovely to catch up with them.

The Vietnamese community is incredibly important in my electorate of Mulgrave, particularly in the suburb of Springvale. In Springvale more than 20 per cent of the population were born in Vietnam and more than a quarter of the suburb speak Vietnamese at home, according to the 2021 census. In fact there are parts of Springvale where a majority of people speak Vietnamese at home. I am proud to have one of the largest Vietnamese communities not only in the state but in the country, and I am thankful that I have been able to attend a number of events within the local Vietnamese community, including celebrations for Lunar New Year and VASA's annual Mother's Day events. I would like to thank VASA for the work that they do and our Vietnamese community for their great contributions not only to my electorate of Mulgrave but also to our state of Victoria.

**Peter Manders**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (15:27): I rise to commemorate the life of Peter Manders, a leader in industry and our community, a family man, a Liberal Party stalwart and a dear friend. Peter had an amazing 50-year career at Carlton & United Breweries and the Foster's Group, where he held the distinguished role of master brewer. Peter also served as the chief judge for the Australian International Beer Awards for 10 years. Peter was a tremendous servant to the Wandin and Yarra Valley community for decades. He personified the volunteer spirit. Peter served as Wandin Yallock school council president for years, fundraising and enabling improvements to school facilities. Peter was also a charter member of the Rotary Club of Wandin and served as president as well as in many other roles during his 40 years of membership. He was a Paul Harris Fellow with Sapphire and was bestowed with life membership of Wandin Rotary for his outstanding service. Peter was a long-term treasurer of the Mont De Lancey historical homestead board, on which we served together as board members. For the Liberal Party, Peter was a long and hardworking member for 34 years, serving in many roles, including as chairman of the Evelyn electorate council when I became the candidate in 2018. I will be forever grateful for his support and friendship. To Peter's wife Annemarie and sons Chris and Tim, you have my deepest condolences. Peter was a great Australian, and I was privileged to call Peter my friend. Vale, Peter Manders.

**Melton electorate fuel prices**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (15:28): I wish I was not up talking about fuel prices in Melton, but unfortunately that is not the case. I did speak about this a few weeks ago. For the week ending 9 June, the national average fuel price was 192.8 cents per litre. In Melton the prices for fuel at every petrol station were \$2.27 or \$2.29 per litre, so from the 7/11 on High Street, the Ampol on Coburns Road and the Shell Coles Express on Exford Road the fuel was up to 37 cents per litre dearer. The people of Melton are victims of price gouging. They are paying premium prices for the same fuel that is available in Bacchus Marsh, Caroline Springs and even Deer Park. Last Friday I travelled from Melton to Geelong and then on to Ballarat. Fuel in all those locations was 48 to 50 cents per litre cheaper.

The Melton fuel outlets are crooks and are taking advantage of the Melton community, and it needs to stop. The Melton people should complain to the ACCC. I have raised this issue with the ACCC, but they are not the regulator of fuel prices. I think they should be investigating price gouging by the fuel outlets in Melton. I have also raised this issue through the Minister for Consumer Affairs' office, and I know they are looking at this. Today as we speak the current national average retail fuel price is 206.7 cents per litre, but in Melton it is 229.7 cents per litre. We need an independent operator in



Melton. I know there is one wanting to come in, and I encourage the council to work with that operator to get them into Melton. I encourage the Melton community to boycott their local petrol stations.

#### **Family Life, Beaumaris**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (15:30): Over the past few weeks I have had the pleasure of participating in a number of events and community celebrations and initiatives showcasing the strength and spirit of the incredible Sandringham community. I had a fantastic visit to the Family Life opportunity shop in Beaumaris. I was met there by Allison, a leader, and the incredible volunteers. I was frankly inspired by the creativity and dedication of that team. It is certainly a great community gem.

#### **Hampton multicultural festival**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (15:30): The Hampton multicultural festival earlier this month was a vibrant celebration of our community's diversity. I thank and acknowledge Melanie and Kate, the managers of Hampton Community Centre, and their volunteers as well. It was wonderful to see everyone come together and share their unique cultures. I even participated in a belly dancing workshop. It was a memorable experience indeed – and, yes, there are photos.

#### **Blé Sucré Patisserie, Mentone**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (15:30): Supporting local business is vital for our community, and I enjoyed a delightful lunch at Mentone Blé Sucré Patisserie and to suss some growth opportunities for the new owners. I acknowledge the great strength of Mervyn and Kathleen, the new owners of that Mentone patisserie.

#### **Community safety**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (15:31): Last Thursday evening my community met at a community safety forum which 300 locals attended, including acting superintendent Martin Bourke of Victoria Police, the member for Malvern and the president of Neighbourhood Watch Phil Lovel. Community safety is important for my community.

#### **Charlton College**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (15:31): On behalf of the member for Mildura, I acknowledge in the gallery Charlton College.

#### **Australian International Academy**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (15:31): On behalf of the people of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, I would like to convey our sincere condolences to the Australian International Academy Islamic school community on the passing of its founder Mr Salah Salman and to his family. A community leader, educator and man of faith, Mr Salman was a leading figure of the Islamic community in the northern suburbs of Melbourne and throughout Victoria. A true pioneer of Muslim education, Mr Salman was a visionary who helped lead the establishment of Australia's first dedicated Islamic primary and secondary school in the heart of my electorate in Coburg way back in 1983 across their Sydney Road and Bakers Road campuses.

Mr Salman would be proud of the spirit and commitment to social justice that is instilled in the students of AIA over 40 years on, with students having recently written to the children of Gaza to convey their sympathies, concerns and solidarity in response to the ongoing tragedy that is unfolding, including Alia, who is 13, who wrote:

Dear People of Palestine,

The people of our School want you all to know that we care about you and we appreciate you.

We pray and make dua for you everyday ... not a minute goes by where we don't think about you ...

My heart shatters when I think about the pain and suffering you have to endure ...

Allah will always be with you, you are not alone.

I wish I could do ... more to help the people of Gaza ... insha'Allah these letters warm your heart ...

Allah (SWT) will have a place for you in Jannah ... Insha'Allah.

Let us all take note of the beautiful, innocent words of the students of AIA college, and let us stand against Islamophobia and antisemitism. Let us work to call for peace and foster social cohesion during these very difficult times. I commend the entire school leadership, including chair Melinda Baarini, Gafiah Dickson, Michelle Shears and Moustafa Elakkoumi as well.

### **Shepparton electorate crime**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (15:33): I wish to acknowledge Gina Sozzi, a proud business owner of Bicaró's restaurant in Shepparton, who reached out to me recently to raise her concerns about the increasing crime rate in my electorate. Gina and her husband Sam's restaurant has been broken into three times in the space of a month, in which stock was stolen and damage done to the building. Gina said it is hard enough trying to run a small business, and this just makes life tougher. Gina said something has to be done and has called for tougher bail reform that will get these reoffenders off the street. Gina said, 'I want to go to work not stressing about another break-in.'

Ozmosis is a clothing store in the CBD of Shepparton. It was broken into on 15 May, when \$15,000 worth of stock was stolen and \$5000 in damage was done to the front entrance and cabinets inside the store. In Mooroopna three businesses recently suffered severe damage to their buildings with a significant cost to repair. With the rise in crime, communities are feeling unsafe in their own homes and businesses are constantly worried if they will be the next target.

The Labor government's recent decision to weaken bail laws and abolish the offence of committing an indictable offence while on bail has left these communities bewildered and feeling unsafe, knowing that the offenders are still out there and in many cases are likely to return. Our police are frustrated and are doing all that they can by getting offenders in front of the magistrate, only for them to receive a slap on the wrist and be back out on the street the very same day. We need our communities to feel safe and to have faith in the legal system. What will it take for this government to get serious on crime and bail penalties?

### **Teachers**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarnait) (15:34): Recently we celebrated Victoria's longest serving teachers with the Recognition of Service to Victorian Education awards. A total of 275 teachers were recognised for their hard work and dedication to serving our community. I want to extend huge congratulations to Cheryl Graham from Tarnait P-9 College as well as Michael Kerry from Hoppers Crossing Secondary College. Both have received awards for 40 years of service to our fantastic local schools. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our students, schools and families. Education sets up our kids for life, and it is fantastic to celebrate our hardworking teachers and continue investing in education across our state.

### **Riverdale North Primary School**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarnait) (15:35): In this spirit of progress I am excited that Riverdale North Primary School is being built in my electorate of Tarnait and is set to open in term 1 next year. This is testament to the government's continued investment in education, ensuring that our children have access to the best learning environments and opportunities anywhere in the country. I would like to say if there are any year 11 or 12 students out there that are yet to figure out what they would like to do when they finish school, become a teacher, because teachers are one of the greatest assets that we have in this state.

### Primary school leaders forum

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (15:36): Last month I hosted a primary school leaders forum where students discussed ideas and participated in a tour at Parliament House. This was an invaluable opportunity for me to hear firsthand about the issues which are important to our young people. One key issue raised with me was cost-of-living pressures, especially those around the cost of housing. Harper from Ruyton Girls' School raised concerns about stamp duty and the role it plays in exacerbating the housing crisis. Many students spoke about the rise in homelessness, including Mira from Chatham Primary, who called for improved local government services. Another important issue raised was mental health and the detrimental effect of social media on young people. Ella from St Bede's drew my attention to its harmful effects in causing body image issues, while William from Chatham raised how upgrading local sports ovals would improve the physical and mental wellbeing of young students. The importance of safe and accessible public transport was another prominent issue raised. Poppy from Our Holy Redeemer Primary School suggested making public transport free for students, while Alana from Genazzano spoke about the equity of all users touching on and off with their Myki.

I would like to thank all the students: Alexander and Zahab from Camberwell Grammar, Mira and William from Chatham Primary, Rena and Shreya from Fintona, Alana and Anita from Genazzano, Gabby and Isabel from Greythorn Primary School, Lucas and Violet from Kew East Primary, Rose and Oliver from Kew Primary School, Olivia and Sarah from MLC, Art and Poppy from Our Holy Redeemer, Christina and Arden from Our Lady of Good Counsel, Harper and Lottie from Ruyton, Alaia and Joel from Sacred Heart, Sylvia and Bailey from St Anne's, Lucas and Ella from St Bede's, James and Fletcher from Trinity, and Tom and Matthew from Xavier.

### Lara Primary School

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (15:37): Last Tuesday was an incredibly fun day for me as I hosted the remarkable grade 5 and 6 students from Lara Primary School for a visit to Parliament House. The students had a guided tour of Parliament and were incredibly impressed with being allowed to spend some time in both chambers and sit in the seats usually occupied by the Premier, Deputy Premier and other leaders in the Parliament. We spoke a lot about government and the role of a local MP in advocating for their communities. During the visit I asked students about what local issues were most important to them. Their number one response was Serendip Sanctuary, which has been much loved by students of Lara Primary over the years, with students spending a week there each year in the classrooms learning about the natural environment on their doorstep. In particular, students are disappointed that there are no longer any breeding programs run from Serendip. They miss their excursions and classroom programs there greatly.

We spoke about the \$11 million commitment that the state Labor government has made to upgrade the facilities and improve the visitor experience at Serendip Sanctuary and the You Yangs Regional Park. We discussed how that funding is allowing Parks Victoria to improve the facilities on offer and also work towards actively looking for community partnerships to support conservation and breeding programs at the site. I had such a great time meeting with all the students, and I especially loved how passionate they were about local issues that affect them. Special thanks to Lara Primary School principal Toni Scott, the teachers involved in the visit, especially Fiona Grills, and of course all the students who came along and were such a wonderful example of their school. I thoroughly enjoyed their visit and I look forward to visiting Lara Primary soon.

### Energy policy

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (15:39): Visitors to Victoria's Great Ocean Road will soon get more than they bargained for. Not only can they marvel at our state's stunning natural landscape, but as they take in the view they can contemplate the astonishing decision of the Victorian Labor government to approve fossil gas extraction right near the Twelve Apostles starting this month. Labor, the Liberals and the gas industry want us to believe that gas has a role in the transition to clean energy, but everyone from Environment Victoria to the United Nations is clear that the only role for gas is to delay the

energy transition while cooking our climate and enriching fossil fuel barons. And for what? The project will give us less than a year's worth of fossil gas, which will be burnt into our atmosphere while littering the area with new gas infrastructure for future generations to clean up – and this project is just the beginning. Labor also plans to allow whale-deafening seismic blasting for offshore gas exploration later this year. The Greens and I will continue to work with traditional owners, the environmental groups and the thousands of community members opposing this project to do everything we can to stop Labor's new fossil fuels.

### **Reclink Community Cup**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (15:40): I recently had the pleasure of representing the Minister for Community Sport at the Reclink Community Cup, which was held at Victoria Park on Sunday. The community cup is a fantastic, very Melbourne event where musicians in the team the Rockdogs take on public radio, the Triple R and PBS Megahertz, in a friendly game of footy. The day features many local acts, this year including the Vovos and Ross Wilson. The event is a staple on the Melbourne calendar. It has been running for over 30 years, and yet again it was another draw. Reclink promotes healthy sport and recreation and arts programs and supports many people experiencing hardship, including mental health challenges, in our community. They really are a terrific organisation. Thanks to the volunteers, staff, founder Peter Cullen, CEO Dave Wells and the wider Reclink community for your fabulous work.

### **Women's Health in the South East**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (15:41): I recently held a women's pain forum in Narre Warren South that was facilitated by the fantastic Kit McMahon from Women's Health in the South East – and a big shout-out to Zoe Francis from the organisation as well. We were joined by the Minister for Health as well as my colleagues the member for Cranbourne and the member for Narre Warren North. Women's health and women's pain are really big issues in our community, and it was terrific for all of those women who came and shared their stories and experiences.

### **Regional health services**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (15:41): I rise today to talk about my community's concern about the amalgamations of rural and regional health services. I think what the government is missing here is that when you take away our local boards, which we rely on and which the hospitals rely on for community input, my community becomes very worried that they will not have that opportunity again if it gets decentralised to another area, whether that be in Latrobe or whether that be down at Monash. It is very important that the community has that connection to the hospital and the board, and I would encourage the government to rethink these amalgamations, because they will not be the best thing for rural or regional hospitals.

### **Narracan electorate volunteers**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (15:42): On another matter, I would like to give a shout-out today to two very, very deserving Medal of the Order of Australia recipients in my electorate, Max Papley and Claire Henshall, who have served our community tirelessly as volunteers for a very, very long time. Probably I had hair when they started, I imagine. They are very, very worthy recipients and very important to our community.

### **Frankston Central post office**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (15:43): The Frankston community has recently learned that the Australia Post office in Frankston will be closing down without any consultation. We have just been surprised. We cannot let this happen for our community members and for our businesses in our thriving city centre. This decision absolutely stinks. The Wells Street central post office is more than just a post office for our community. It is a hub for businesses and for community members – a centralised area where people go to send things to their families and loved ones, to collect mail, to pay

bills, to get passport photos and to do their banking. Yet our Wells Street post office is closing, apparently. As I said, there has been no consultation on this decision by the Australia Post board, who tell us that they are at the heart of every community in their 2023 annual report. Well, Australia Post, before you rip the heart out of our community, I want you to know that here is a message signed, sealed and delivered from the Frankston community straight to you: we will not take this lying down. We are angry. Do not close our post office.

#### **Parliament House gardens**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:44): Every time I am in this place it never fails to blow me away how incredible the gardens are here at Parliament House. I would say they are one of Melbourne's best kept secrets. There is a small but dedicated team of professionals that look after the gardens, some of which date back to as early as the 1850s, with the gardenesque style, based on stylised planting and sweeping wide paths and lawns, through to modern native Australian planting at the top of the rear annexe, where our offices are. It was designed as a sanctuary in the middle of the capital, and you can come and take a tour to experience it for yourself. Check out the Parliament website for more details.

#### **Bayswater electorate sporting facilities**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:44): It was fantastic to see the Allan Labor government's promise to deliver a new digital scoreboard and new goal nets down at the Bear Cave for the Basin Football Netball Club and the Basin Cricket Club, fantastic community organisations. A big thanks to people like Alex Winters and Matt Young for helping to deliver that, among others. It was a very proud commitment that we made in the last term, and now we see that fully delivered, making volunteers' lives easier.

#### **Angliss Hospital**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:45): Construction has now started on the Angliss Hospital; I know the member for Monbulk and the Minister for Health Infrastructure are very excited. There are 32 new inpatient unit beds, four new operating suites, a new central sterilisation service department – I got it right – new amenities and new car parks. It is going to be absolutely fantastic. They are healthcare facilities that the east absolutely deserves.

#### **Daniel Andrews AC**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:45): Lastly, I would like to give a big congratulations and shout-out to former Premier Daniel Andrews on his well-deserved King's Birthday honours. I know Victorians were really pleased to see him honoured for his commitment and service to public life.

#### **Westside Community Desexing**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (15:45): I would like to take this opportunity to say what a pleasure it was to visit the Westside Community Desexing centre just a few weeks ago. The centre was fortunate enough to receive not one but two grants from the Animal Welfare Fund, amounting to \$100,000 in total that it has now received from our government. These funds will be used for the purchase of safe and reliable transportation vehicles for cats and kittens as well as to provide responsible pet education to the community.

Westside Community Desexing originated in 2020 when doctors Ann Enright and Penny Hocking crossed paths while volunteering at a desexing clinic. Since opening they have desexed over 5000 cats in the west and prevented the birth of potentially more than 33,000 kittens. In Melbourne's west there are close to 180,000 cats owned by residents, while 60,000 to 80,000 are strays. To minimise the number of cats and kittens entering pounds, affordable and accessible desexing is required. With the goal of addressing cat overpopulation and reducing euthanasia rates in unreserved areas, Westside Community Desexing is on a mission to desex the west. By addressing the root causes of overpopulation and reducing euthanasia rates, desexing not only enhances animal welfare but also

contributes to building healthier and much more sustainable communities, particularly in Melbourne's west.

#### **Wendouree electorate sporting facilities**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (15:47): Great news for the North Ballarat Football & Netball Club and the North Ballarat Cricket Club, with \$5 million from the Allan Labor government to deliver new clubrooms and facilities at north oval 2. It was great to be at the NBFNC sponsors day on Saturday to make the announcement with board chair Richard Start, netball director Ally Driscoll, junior director Shea McInerney, club director Angela Kerry and so many supporters, families and friends. The much-needed upgrade of the Frank Bourke Oval will deliver four new change rooms, including female-friendly rooms, umpires change rooms, administration and soccer facilities, a verandah and AFL-standard storage facilities to be built at the oval. This \$5 million investment will benefit junior and senior cricketers, netballers and footballers and also encourage the establishment of a women's football team at the senior level. This is another great project following on from our investment in the female-friendly project, which saw the construction of female-friendly change rooms beside the netball courts as well as two brand new netball courts.

#### **Ballarat Hindu Temple & Cultural Centre**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (15:48): It was great to attend the Ballarat Hindu Temple & Cultural Centre Inc. AGM with the member for Eureka and the member for Ripon. Congratulations to the new executive: president Pradush Narayanan, vice-president Raveen Chilukuri, secretary Lalitha Shankar, joint secretary Vijayshankar Sriram, treasurer Narayana Vasantha and joint treasurer Harishankar Parippaayillam.

#### **Philippines Independence Day**

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (15:48): Last week it was my pleasure to join with the Consul General of the Philippines Maria Lourdes Salcedo, along with colleagues and friends, to celebrate the national day of the 126th anniversary of the Philippines' independence. It was another fantastic opportunity to come together and celebrate the occasion and to celebrate the amazing Filipino community in Victoria and the many strong people-to-people connections that exist in our thriving and growing community.

We have an amazing Filipino community locally in Clarinda and in the south-east, with some truly amazing local organisations. The Pilipino Elderly Association of South East Region, or PEASER, as they are affectionately known, is one. For more than 30 years they have been a vital resource for the local community, providing an important space for companionship and cultural activities. Members' activities include visiting nursing homes and the sick and holding regular cultural activities, social events, information sessions and the like. There are also the members of the dancing group, which performs cultural dances from different regions of the Filipino sections of the community and at festivals around Melbourne. It is based out of the Sundowner Community Centre in Clarinda, and there is such a friendly and welcoming atmosphere there. I would like to commend – (*Time expired*)

#### **Eid al-Adha**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (15:50): I had a terrific opportunity to celebrate with members of the Victorian Muslim community a really important particular celebration with the Tawhid social association. I would like to wish Eid Mubarak and thank Nazer Nazir for the hospitality and for being able to welcome my colleague the federal member as well for that celebration last Sunday night.

#### **Cranbourne Football Netball Club**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (15:50): I would also like to congratulate the Cranbourne Football Netball Club for what has been a really important club and a really successful season so far. I am always grateful for the hospitality, and I was pleased to be able to go down with my friend

Mr Galea from the other place to visit. There is a lot going on in Cranbourne. I have a really strong and vibrant community, and I am always grateful.

### *Bills*

## **Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024**

### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Jacinta Allan:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (15:51): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. Members may well ask themselves: how did we get to this? In my time in this place, which has been nearly 18 years now, we have seen a lot of changes in the way in which members are regulated. When I consider how those changes came about, almost every single one of them came about because of bad behaviour by MPs – people breaking the rules, people rorting, people being dishonest – and it is those actions by those individuals that have ultimately led us to where we are today. I can recall the former – and I emphasise former – Speaker and former Deputy Speaker in this place, Mr Languiller and Mr Nardella, very senior officials of this house charged with upholding its standards, and yet both of those individuals were found to have rorted their second-residence allowances. They both represented western suburbs seats but claimed to be living in Queenscliff in the case of Mr Languiller and a caravan park in the case of Mr Nardella – a caravan park where the local residents who actually lived in the caravan park had never actually seen the bloke. So it was pure and utter rorting of second-residence allowances, and that led to a tightening up of the rules in relation to those. Bad behaviour of Labor MPs leads to changes of the rules.

Then of course we saw the former Labor minister Steve Herbert. It is very appropriate that it is 'Bring your dog to Parliament' day today, because of course we all famously remember the former minister Steve Herbert using his ministerial car with driver to chauffeur around his two dogs Patch and Ted, driving them from Trentham up in country Victoria down to Melbourne. Once again we get bad behaviour of Labor ministers –

#### *Members interjecting.*

**Michael O'BRIEN**: If any members actually want to defend this outrageous conduct, then let them do it, but these are facts. You have a rorting minister using his ministerial car and driver to ferry around his personal pets. Is it any wonder this government does not care about running a decent public transport system when not only do they not have to rely on it for themselves, they do not have to rely on it for their dogs?

Then of course we famously had 21 Labor MPs embroiled in the red shirts scandal – and scandal it was. And didn't this government do everything it could to try and stop that scandal from ever seeing the light of day. This government even took the extraordinary step of taking the Victorian Ombudsman all the way to the High Court of Australia. That is how desperate the government was to stop that rorting disgrace, that scandal of the red shirts, from ever seeing the light of day. Thankfully, the High Court sided with the law, as you would expect, but also sided with the interests of transparency and democracy, and when that report came down those Labor MPs were condemned. They were found to have effectively stolen over \$388,000 from taxpayers, which was forced to be repaid, and that led to further changes in the rules.

And then how did we get to this point? Well, we had the IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman undertake a joint operation. I think it was the first joint operation in their history, and it was one that was initiated at the behest of the opposition, I am proud to say – I think I was Leader of the Opposition at the time. When the stories emerged about the sort of rorting and abuse of publicly funded resources that we saw from members of the Labor Party in this government, Labor MPs and Labor ministers – abuse of electorate offices and entitlements, abuse of electorate staff, abuse of ministerial offices and

entitlements and abuse of ministerial staff – it was an absolute disgrace, and what we saw was a very lengthy, deep investigation into the rorting of members of this Labor government in Operation Watts.

I see the member for Mordialloc here, and of course he got more than a passing mention in terms of his penchant for using stamps that were not his and were not paid for by him to run his election campaign. There are plenty of members still in this place today –

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Mate, IBAC said it in the report. I do not have to worry about parliamentary privilege. I am very happy to walk out the 10 steps any time you like, sunshine.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** When you start identifying back on the right, like before you started identifying as a Socialist Left, then we might hear from you, okay?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Mordialloc will cease interjecting, please.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** So we have absolutely rorting, disgraceful behaviour by members of the Labor Party and members of this Labor government, and once again it is because of the rorting by this Labor Party and this Labor government that Operation Watts brought down these recommendations that, no, MPs – mainly Labor MPs – cannot be trusted to actually behave decently, to keep their fingers out of the till and to behave in an honourable way. For that reason we had the recommendation to establish an independent parliamentary commission. I should say, that is before we even get to Banquo's ghosts over there – those whose names shall not be spoken, those who do not even put in an appearance anymore despite receiving a full MP's salary. I refer of course to the member for Ringwood and the member for South Barwon.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael O'BRIEN:** To hear the catcalls of those opposite defending the member for Ringwood and defending the member for South Barwon is extraordinary. I am not sure why they are defending them. If you are defending them, why don't you go over and sit with them? Why don't you get them to turn up to work occasionally? That would be lovely. That poor community of Ringwood is left unrepresented and the community of South Barwon is left unrepresented because once again appalling behaviour by Labor members of this Parliament has led to the public being ripped off and denied. This is what we have seen time and time again. I have gone through a litany; there are many more.

I could go back even further into history. I could refer to the Labor member in the other place who actually assigned the use of his electorate car to his former wife as part of a divorce settlement only for that electorate-funded car to then be used as a getaway vehicle in a shoplifting ring. There is a long history of this. There is a long history of the Labor Party rorting public entitlements. The public is rightly sick of it, and because the Labor Party cannot be trusted to keep their fingers out of the till, because they cannot be trusted to keep their hands to themselves, that is why we are in this place today. We are all condemned in the public's eyes, but we should all know that this is a Labor Party problem. They are the rorters. They are the ones who have done the wrong thing, and this is why we have this bill before the house today.

This bill seeks to establish a Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission in legislation to investigate allegations of parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints referred to from the IBAC. It also seeks to establish a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser in legislation. We already have one, but this is designed to put this into legislation and to provide confidential advice and training to MPs, ministers and parliamentary secretaries. It also seeks to establish a Parliamentary Ethics Committee in legislation to foster an ethical parliamentary workplace through the promotion of the members code of conduct and other obligations in Parliament and in the community. I should note that in addition to all the Labor rorting, which I have put on the public record and which has been the



progenitor of this bill, it considers investigations at the federal level, including the independent review into Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces report, otherwise known as the Jenkins report, undertaken by Kate Jenkins.

So how would this new parliamentary commissioner work? The first issue is how you would be establishing the qualifications for a parliamentary commissioner. The government initially felt that the government should have the ability to appoint parliamentary commissioners with only a cursory majority on the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC). This is completely unacceptable because we know this government likes to stack committees, and if this commissioner is to be truly independent, there can be no suggestion that the Labor government has put its Labor mates in to try and make sure that they can turn a blind eye to rotting and bad behaviour. Then the government's next suggestion was to make it a two-thirds majority of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, but that was not acceptable. If this is to be genuinely independent and enjoy genuine cross-party support, it must be unanimous, and I am pleased that as a result of our views being taken into account by the government in discussions prior to this bill being introduced we do see a bill that requires any appointment of a commissioner to be unanimously endorsed by the Integrity and Oversight Committee. That is a very important safeguard to make sure we do not get another Labor mate put into a position of power to turn a blind eye to bad behaviour.

There are other issues as well. The bill provides for certain disqualifications in relation to somebody being appointed as a commissioner. Some of those disqualifications are if the person is or has at any time in the last five years been a member of an Australian Parliament – that is, any Australian Parliament; if they are or have at any time in the last five years been a councillor of an Australian local council; if they are or have at any time in the last five years been a member of a registered political party; or if they are or have been at any time in the last five years registered on the register of lobbyists. There are a couple of other disqualifying provisions: if they are an insolvent under administration or if they are a candidate for election to a Parliament or to a council. We do not believe that five years is enough. I think that we need people who are sufficiently removed from the day-to-day battle of politics to be regarded as truly independent. So we will be seeking to amend the bill to increase that disqualification period from five years to 10 years.

There is another amendment that we will be seeking to make, and that is in relation to the provisions for the appointment of acting commissioners. The government has listened for once and understood that this bill will not be received with support from other parties in Parliament unless we can be confident that the commissioners will not be partisan political appointments, and to that end the government agreed that the IOC must unanimously agree to the appointment of any potential commissioner. However, when it comes to an acting commissioner that is not the case. When it comes to an acting commissioner – and remember under this bill acting commissioners operate for up to a year; they can be appointed for six months and can be renewed, so an acting commissioner can be engaged for up to a year – there is no requirement for IOC endorsement with any majority, simply a requirement that the IOC be consulted. That is absolutely unacceptable to this side of the house. To think that we could have a commissioner who is appointed with the unanimous support of the IOC and then that commissioner could be outvoted by two acting commissioners put in by the Labor Party – two of their mates put in by the Labor Party with only the obligation to consult with the IOC on who those acting appointments are – is absolutely unacceptable to this side of the house, and we need to see this changed or this bill will not receive our support. We will not support this bill if that is not changed, so under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

#### **Amendments circulated under standing orders.**

**Michael O'BRIEN:** The amendments that I have circulated increase the prohibition period, or the disqualification period, for a potential commissioner in relation to those matters that I have previously referred to from five years to 10 years. They also require that any appointment of an acting commissioner must also be unanimously endorsed by the members of the Integrity and Oversight

Committee, and that is an absolutely vital safeguard to ensure that this commission is not stacked by Labor mates – not for a second, not for a day. Otherwise this bill will not receive support from this side of the house.

There are other matters that concern us in this bill. Some of the matters that concern us about this bill are what is not in this bill. This bill has a dual-track approach in relation to the way in which ministers and parliamentary secretaries are dealt with compared to members of Parliament. Now, I should say where an allegation or complaint is made about a minister or a parliamentary secretary in their capacity as a member of Parliament the process is the same. That is equal and that is right, and we would not consider supporting the bill otherwise. But we accept that in relation to breaches of things like ministerial codes of conduct – things which are within the purview of the government rather than the Parliament – there is a dual-track process. For example, reports from the commissioner after an investigation go the Premier before they go to the Parliament rather than going to the Privileges Committee before going to the Parliament.

One of the things that concerns us and I understand concerns a lot of members on the other side is we do not want to see any situation where there is unequal treatment. We would not want to see a situation where ministers and parliamentary secretaries are potentially able to access support for legal assistance in relation to dealing with complaints through the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority that is not also available to a member of Parliament. I mean, we have to be genuinely serious about these issues. It should be a level playing field, and legal advice and support should be either available to none or available to all. We have asked the government about this and understand the government has acknowledged that this is a problem and it is a problem that needs to be fixed. The government have advised us that they believe this requires a policy solution rather than a legislative solution. Well, time is running out. This bill is now in the Parliament. It is going to be debated this week, and I want to place on the record that as far as the Liberals and the Nationals – the coalition – are concerned we are very much reserving our position on this bill in the other place until this issue of legal costs is dealt with. It is a matter of fairness to every member of this house and a matter of fairness to every member of the other place. Ministers and parliamentary secretaries should not have any advantage over any backbench member of Parliament on either side. It just should not be the case.

**A member** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** Well, Minister, the government has acknowledged through bill briefings that this is a live issue. The government has said it is an issue that needs to be dealt with. The government has told us it needs to be dealt with as a policy response rather than a legislative response. What I am making very clear is that that policy response needs to be dealt with prior to this bill being debated in the other place, because we will not be supporting it – we will not consider supporting it – unless that is done. This is a matter of absolute fairness.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** I am not sure which side of the bar table you would have been on, member for Mordialloc. You might have been in the dock, mate. I never did crime. I probably would not have seen the member for Mordialloc, but anyway. Please do not pretend that members of your own caucus have not also raised these as issues, because we know you have. And, do you know what, the wheel does turn, because one day members of the government will be on the other side of this place. Hopefully it is sooner rather than later, but we all know one day it is going to happen. What is important is that this system is fair to all, and it is not fair to say that a minister should be able to receive some form of legal assistance in relation to a complaint made against them but a backbencher, who could have a complaint over exactly the same or a similar sort of alleged conduct, receives no support. We just want a level playing field. We think that is fair and that is completely within the spirit of the IBAC and Ombudsman's report. The government has said it requires a policy response rather than a legislative response. What I am saying is: get that policy response and get it in place before this matter, before this bill, goes to a vote in the place upstairs.

As to how the bill actually operates, this has changed a lot from the initial drafts. I acknowledge the government has been willing to listen to concerns that have been expressed to it, and we have seen significant changes in the bill. Effectively the bill will set up the independent commission, and the independent commission can receive complaints effectively from anybody at all. The first process that occurs is that it can act as a clearing house if a matter needs to be referred to a more appropriate agency. For example, if a matter complained about is clearly a criminal matter, it can be referred to Victoria Police. If a matter concerned relates to serious corruption or misconduct in public office, it can be referred potentially to IBAC. It can be referred to the Ombudsman. There are other options that are available to it. There is also the power contained in this bill for the commission to decide not to continue with a complaint where clearly it is trivial, it is frivolous, it is vexatious or it lacks substance. Having been in this place for quite a while, I think we are all aware that we have certain constituents – some of us refer to them as ‘frequent flyers’ – who may have unrealistic levels of expectation as to –

**Tim Richardson:** Do you go to yours?

**Michael O’BRIEN:** I do, and I live in my electorate too, member for Mordialloc. You should try it sometime. It is good. When I started in Parliament there was one thing that Liberal MPs and Labor MPs both agreed on, and that was that Liberal electorates are great places to live. It is true.

We need to have a process where trivial, vexatious, frivolous complaints are weeded out. We cannot have a situation where members have to respond to complaints that are without basis. So I think it is appropriate that this bill does contain certain safeguards in that regard, that they can just simply be dismissed. We do need to also ensure that there are opportunities for matters to be dealt with in ways other than full investigations and there is effectively an alternative dispute resolution route that the commissioner is able to take. Where it is more appropriate that a matter be dealt with through conciliation on a voluntary basis, then the bill provides for that. In the bill it is termed ‘an appropriate dispute resolution’ mechanism.

In summary, the commission, when it receives a complaint, or what is known as a ‘referral’ in the bill, can redirect, it can dismiss, it can engage in appropriate dispute resolution or it can investigate. Investigate obviously is the most serious of the options that are available to it at that stage. Under the bill there is power to conduct an investigation. Obviously there is some limit to the ability of the commission to require members of Parliament or ministers or parliamentary secretaries to appear or produce documents. However, failure to do so is the sort of thing that can result in adverse comment and can be regarded as potentially misconduct in some way.

Following an investigation – and I should say that this is where the issue about legal cost does need to be resolved, because there are, appropriately, rights to consult with legal representation to be represented in certain circumstances during the conduct of an investigation – it is then a matter where the commission can determine that parliamentary misconduct has occurred. I will not go into all the definitions, but obviously there are different degrees of seriousness in relation to findings that can be made. In relation to non-serious parliamentary misconduct, there is capacity for the commission to impose sanctions directly. That I think is important, and the sorts of sanctions that are able to be imposed by the commission directly include the ability to require that a public apology, for example, be made or an explanation can be made. There can be a requirement to participate in a facilitated meeting with an affected person. There can be withdrawal of services, removal of access to certain facilities or other personal restriction relating to the functions of the MP. I would just say that obviously there would be the ability to make it very, very difficult for an MP to do their job if that sanction was used in an overly zealous way. Given that the bill does not provide for the commission to have the direct power to remove an MP from Parliament, I would hope that they would take that on board in relation to how they might exercise that power of sanction in relation to the removal of access to facilities or services.

They can directly require discharge of any other sanction that the commission considers appropriate. Where there is a finding of serious parliamentary misconduct or a failure by the MP to comply with

an investigation request without reasonable excuse, the commission may not impose but may recommend more serious sanctions, and that includes, again, a requirement to provide – actually, I beg your pardon, I think the sanctions I referred to were what the committee may recommend. So in terms of what the commission can actually do –

**A member** interjected.

**Michael O'BRIEN:** No, it is important we get this one right. In terms of written apologies, participation in facilitated meetings et cetera I think it is important, but in terms of more serious matters it is essential that the Parliament ultimately remain in charge of that. It is also important that there be transparency. The system is, in relation to a complaint against an MP, if the finding is of serious parliamentary misconduct, the report goes to the Privileges Committee of the relevant house. That Privileges Committee has the opportunity to consider the report and to invite a response from the member concerned, and then the Privileges Committee may make a report to this house, if it is the Assembly Privileges Committee, and recommend the original recommendation of the commission or in fact make another recommendation. Either way, the house and therefore the public will see what the commission recommended, and I think that is an important transparency element.

One of the matters that has arisen is: what happens where a report has been made and a complaint has been investigated but there has been effectively a finding that there is nothing to it, there is no substance to it? In terms of reputational protection for people who have not done the wrong thing, it is important that the commission take into account those matters contained within this bill, but there are times when it may not be appropriate for unexpurgated reports to be made where there is effectively no finding of wrongdoing on the part of a member. We are all entitled to have the presumption of innocence, and on that basis it is important that those safeguards be observed by the commission.

In relation to ministers and parliamentary secretaries where the complaints are against them acting in that capacity, similarly the commission can impose sanctions for minor matters. In terms of serious matters, it goes to the Premier and the Premier will ultimately have the say on what sanctions are imposed. But in both circumstances the commission's report will be tabled in the Parliament and therefore there will be transparency. This is going to be a new world for all of us. Previously we have been, as members, used to collectively dealing with the Presiding Officer and dealing with the Privileges Committee where there have been matters of wrongdoing. This is going to introduce a new independent and arms-length process where complaints against members of Parliament – ministers, parliamentary secretaries and even the Premier – can be investigated and be investigated independently of us. I think in a modern workplace that is appropriate, and that is where we have got to because of, as I established at the start of my contribution, the behaviour of members on the other side of this place over a long period of time.

In terms of other changes in the bill, as I mentioned, the bill does establish the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser in legislation. This office has been operating for some time, but to give it a statutory basis it is contained in the bill. The bill also establishes a Parliamentary Ethics Committee, which shall be a joint committee consisting of six, eight or 10 members – I am not quite sure why the government is so unsure as to how many members this would comprise – half from the Assembly and half from the Council. Importantly, it also provides that not more than half of the members of the Parliamentary Ethics Committee may be members of a political party forming the government. So this would be a non-government-controlled committee, and I think it would be in the interests of democracy to see a little bit more of that.

This is a bill which does have some safeguards in relation to unfair accusations against members of Parliament. The commission has the ability to issue a confidentiality notice where it believes on reasonable grounds that disclosure of one or more restricted matters would be likely to prejudice investigations by integrity bodies, the safety or reputation of a person or the fair trial of a person who has been or may be charged with an offence.

I do note that while a confidentiality notice may be issued in those circumstances, that can only take effect once the complaint or the referral has been received and there is nothing to stop an individual from going to the press about the fact they have made the referral or complaint before any opportunity for a confidentiality notice can be engaged.

It is very sad that it has come to this and that we are apparently no longer capable of collectively behaving, and as I said, the behaviour of Labor MPs over a number of years has led us to this very sad place. The opposition is very serious about these amendments. We are also very serious about resolving the legal costs matter. At this point the opposition will not be opposing the bill in this place, but I make clear our position in the other place is reserved until the government accepts amendments, improves this bill and makes this truly a level playing field.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (16:21): I rise to make a contribution on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024, a bill that represents a very important step in strengthening Victoria's parliamentary standards and Victoria's integrity regime. The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill is designed to promote the highest standards of accountability, integrity and behaviour among all members of Parliament, including ministers and parliamentary secretaries. It is a bill that implements seven recommendations from the IBAC and Victorian Ombudsman's report into Operation Watts, and it will be the most significant overhaul of parliamentary oversight not just in Victoria but also in Australia.

The member for Malvern just concluded a 30-minute opening contribution on this legislation. I did not catch the start of his contribution, but when I did walk in he was talking about a couple of former members of this side of the house. I have got to say it was pretty gutsy of him to do that, because I do not think anybody should claim purity here. I am not going to go through all of the members of that side of the house who have not behaved appropriately at all times, but I will mention one thing in that space. If we think back to what was happening in this house exactly 10 years ago in the dying days of the Napthine LNP government, when one Geoff Shaw, formerly a Liberal member for Frankston, turned independent, was threatening their parliamentary majority, they refused to take action on the former member for Frankston until such time as it was constitutionally impossible for his resignation to cause a by-election. You can be purist about this, but frankly you do not have a leg to stand on on these issues.

I could go on. I could talk about a former Liberal member for Hastings who was a member of the member for Malvern's party room when he was leader for two years or whatever it was. But at the end of the day, as I said at the outset, let us not claim purity here, because our singular focus has to be on lifting standards. At the end of the day people are fallible. Politicians are human, and I have got to say the most confronting thing about becoming a member of Parliament is that your life does change. Suddenly there are transgressions that when you are not a member of Parliament or not a person in public life would otherwise go unnoticed. Suddenly as a member of Parliament you do have that added layer of scrutiny and also self-scrutiny. These integrity bodies that we have but also codes of conduct and all of these things that have been improved by both sides of the house over the years have served to make sure that we seek the best in ourselves and that we are always lifting our standards as members of Parliament, because that is exactly what we need to be doing. I have always said that there are a lot of people in the community who do have a dim view of politicians. It is not just here in Victoria, not just throughout Australia, but all over the world. For some people, there is not much that we can do to change those views. But what that is to all of us is a reminder that we always need to seek to do better, and that is what this bill does.

It should not go without being mentioned that my seat of Bentleigh is named after Sir Thomas Bent. Sir Thomas Bent was –

**Michael O'Brien:** Bent by name, bent by nature.

**Nick STAIKOS:** That is right, member for Malvern. Sir Thomas Bent was the Premier of Victoria from 1904 to 1909. Before that, he was Minister of Railways. Throughout all of that he served on the Moorabbin shire as well, concurrently. The reason why he did that is because back then it was the local councils who maintained the voters roll, so he certainly wanted a say in who was on the voters roll. There are all sorts of things that I can say about Thomas Bent, but we have thankfully come a long way since then. The reality is that both sides of politics over the years have sought to strengthen our integrity regime. As I said, this is one of the most significant overhauls in recent memory.

I will now go through some of the key features of the bill. Firstly, the cornerstone of this bill is the establishment of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission, an independent body which will be responsible for receiving, managing, investigating and resolving allegations of parliamentary misconduct and inappropriate workplace behaviour, including bullying, harassment, discrimination, victimisation and occupational violence and aggression. The commission has been developed based on recommendations from detailed reviews and best practices from existing integrity frameworks in other jurisdictions. It will operate under seven guiding principles: integrity, independence, effectiveness, accountability, transparency, respect and safety, and fairness. These principles will ensure that the commission supports the integrity of Parliament and meets community expectations of their elected representatives.

The bill also introduces complementary reforms to the code of conduct in the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978. MPs will have a positive obligation to foster a healthy, safe, respectful and inclusive environment in the parliamentary workplace, free from bullying, sexual harassment, assault and discrimination. MPs will also be required to demonstrate respect for parliamentary standards and integrity, including complying with reasonable requests made by the commission. In relation to any MP, including any minister or parliamentary secretary acting in their capacity as an MP, the bill defines 'parliamentary misconduct' broadly as: contravention of the MP code of conduct; a wilful, repeated or deliberate contravention of part 4 of the MP standards act; wilful, repeated or deliberate misuse of work-related parliamentary allowances; wilful, repeated or deliberate misuse of the electoral office and communications budget; and inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour.

I also just want to say a word on how the bill deals with the issue of frivolous complaints – and of course we know that there will be frivolous complaints received. Under the bill, the commission will be empowered to dismiss complaints on a range of grounds, including if they lack substance or credibility; are not made in good faith; are unsupported by sufficient evidence; or are trivial, vexatious or made on frivolous grounds. Additionally, it is a criminal offence, punishable by up to 12 months in prison, to provide false or misleading information to the commission. These measures ensure that the commission's resources are focused on legitimate issues and prevent the misuse of the complaints process. The commission may decide to investigate a matter, and it has appropriate powers to request information or attendance at an interview. It can apply to the Supreme Court to determine if a person has a reasonable excuse not to comply with an investigation request, and if a current or former member fails to comply without reasonable excuse, the commission can recommend sanctions for noncompliance or report the noncompliance to Parliament.

I also just wanted to say: what this brings into the Parliament is process – process to deal with certain events where members of Parliament are not behaving appropriately, process that everybody understands and process I think that will make members of Parliament, both current members of Parliament and future members of Parliament, better and more honest representatives of the people.

I think by and large people who are in public office in parliaments throughout Australia, not just in Victoria, are good, honest people, people of significant integrity. I think by global standards we already have a very robust system of integrity. But as I said at the outset of this contribution, we constantly need to be seeking to do better, to improve our systems and to make sure that we are the best possible representatives of our electorates. This is a strong bill that will do just that. I commend it to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (16:31): I rise to make a contribution on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024 following on from the Shadow Attorney-General and our lead speaker. I commend the Shadow Attorney-General for the work he has done, and some of the other members of this side of the chamber for the work they have done, working with the government. I give credit to the government as well for actually being open to discussing this bill, to take it forward and get a sensible outcome. If the government take on board the two, I think, very good suggestions from the Shadow Attorney-General around amendments to this bill, which will make it even better, there is the opportunity to move forward together on this particular piece of legislation. It can be rather unique in this place to have that sort of situation, but it is important.

This piece of legislation came out of Operation Watts, which was a joint investigation conducted by IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman. It was initiated following two referrals: one from the Attorney-General to IBAC, and from the Legislative Council to the Ombudsman following allegations of branch stacking involving the misuse of public funds by certain moderate Labor members of Parliament, although I think there is conjecture as to whether it was limited just to that particular faction of the Labor Party. The investigation examined a range of matters, including allegations of misuse of electorate officers, ministerial office staff and resources for branch stacking and other party-related activities. The key findings included the hiring of unqualified people into publicly funded roles, using those roles to support factional work, nepotism, forging signatures, bullying behaviour and attempts to interfere with government grants. The key recommendation arising from the report, as has already been talked about, is the establishment of a Parliamentary Ethics Committee and a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, which this piece of legislation puts into place.

I suppose again, like the Shadow Attorney-General said, we are in this situation principally because of the fact that an element of the Labor Party membership in this place could not keep their hands out of the cookie jar. If you actually look over the history of my time in this place and you think back – and I know the member for Bentleigh did not want to talk about those sorts of issues, but I think we do need to talk about those issues to lift the lid on corruption. Until you actually lift the lid on misconduct by parliamentarians, you do not actually get change. I think Operation Watts and some of the other investigations that have happened by the Ombudsman and by IBAC have actually lifted the lid, which is why we are in the situation where we have this legislation before us today.

I just find it absolutely offensive that we had in a previous Parliament a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker who lost their positions because they rorted the second residence allowance. To have a member of Parliament deliberately relocate a distance away from Melbourne to qualify for the second residence allowance, if they did, and then take that money I think is just abhorrent. It is wrong and it brings us all into disrepute. The unfortunate situation is that when any MP – it does not matter almost in what state or whether it is federal – does something wrong it taints us all. We are all deemed to be one of those politicians out there that are always looking to do something wrong to get some advantage of some sort. So when the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker in that particular Parliament did that, that brought us all into disrepute.

*Members interjecting.*

**Peter WALSH:** You just worry about licking the stamps you have got stashed away in your office, mate. You just worry about licking the stamps that are stashed away. You just go and lick the stamps.

We had a former minister who thought it was appropriate to use a separate ministerial car to cart his dogs to his residence in country Victoria, not put them in the car with him but send them ahead in a ministerial car on their own with a driver and then follow in his car at some later stage. When someone thinks that that is all right, we know the standards have actually fallen lower. And again, we are all ridiculed about, ‘Well, are you using your car to cart your dogs around?’ That is not the first time that happened. From my recollection it also happened to a former minister, Minister Barry Rowe, I think, if I remember rightly, who actually used a second car to take his dogs to the Melbourne show, going back to the Cain–Kirner era.

So there is a pattern on the other side by an element – and I am not putting all the members on the other side in that category, but there is a pattern on that side of the house – where somehow they think it is all right to use taxpayers funds for inappropriate purposes. We have seen that with the use of printing allowances. We have seen it with the use of stamps for that sort of thing. It is just not right, so this legislation puts in place a process where if there is a report, that can be investigated. As the Shadow Attorney-General set out, we will still have left in place the Privileges Committee to have the final call on what it believes the penalty should be once it gets to be a serious issue. But the Privileges Committee, if it disagrees with the commission's finding or disagrees with the commission's recommendations, actually has to put in writing why it disagrees with that recommendation and why it is making a separate recommendation. I think there is the balance there.

Some people are concerned about this legislation. I suppose some people are concerned about speed restrictions, whether they be 40 kilometres, 60 kilometres, 80 kilometres or 100 kilometres. But only those that break the speed limits have concerns about those particular limits. If you do not speed, you do not get booked. As one of my former colleagues used to say, it is taxation by choice. If you choose to speed, you run the risk of getting caught and you pay the fines and that goes into consolidated revenue. So if people do the right thing, if people talk to the parliamentary staff about what is appropriate to use allowances for and what is appropriate to do, they should never fall foul of this particular piece of legislation, but it is there to make sure that people do do the right thing.

Can I urge the government on the other side to take the Shadow Attorney-General's amendments seriously. I think the change from five years to 10 years for effectively a non-compete clause in the legislation, that if you have been a member of Parliament, if you have been a councillor, if you have worked for parliamentarians or if you have been a member of a political party –

**A member** interjected.

**Peter WALSH:** or if you have been a lobbyist, thank you – you cannot serve as a commissioner. I think that change from five to 10 years is suitable and relevant, because if you actually look at today's world, people are entering politics at a younger age in general. That is a good thing. We are getting a good diversity across the chamber of gender, of age, of employment and of experience, but someone could be in here at 30 or 35 years old, be out, and then – five years goes very, very quickly – they could end up being put in place for one of these particular commissioner roles. So I think 10 years is a good balance that the Shadow Attorney-General has put there. Also the fact around the appointment of the temporary or acting commissioners, making sure that they have the same right of veto as people on the independent oversight committee as far as their appointment goes – they both make sense, and in the spirit of how both sides of the chamber have worked together on this piece of legislation, I would hope that the government takes those issues seriously as it moves from this house to the other house as we move it forward.

Just to finish off, if you do not do anything wrong, this legislation is not going to be an issue. If you do something wrong – if you have not sought the correct advice, if you have not followed that advice – there is the potential that you can wind up being reported to this commission. You could find yourself having a recommendation against you in this commission. The only concern that I have and a number of other MPs have raised is the risk of this being weaponised. There is a risk, from either side, of this being weaponised and someone using it for a political stunt to embarrass someone, to have them dragged before it, to leak to the press that they have done this so it actually comes out and embarrasses someone when they maybe have not done anything wrong. So I suppose the only caution with the legislation – and as I said, it goes to both sides of the chamber – is making sure that this is not weaponised and used as an attack weapon against MPs rather than an actual integrity body, as it is intended to be.

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (16:40): I rise to speak on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. This is a new bill that will have a key role examining the behaviour of members



of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries, including around allegations of bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and victimisation. I am sad to tell you that I have myself as a worker, not in this place but in many other places, experienced sexual harassment, bullying and victimisation, particularly at a time when I was young and I was a waitress. It was, unfortunately, commonplace in many workplaces where I worked that young women had to face this, and I am really glad our government has taken the steps forward to improve our workplace safety standards across this state to make sexual harassment, victimisation and bullying issues that are dealt with under the workplace safety act and make sure that there are supports out there for young women to be able to report to. Unfortunately, one in three workers that were surveyed had experienced sexual harassment within their workplace in the last five years. Half of those incidents were repeated, and of those, half were ongoing for more than a year. That is just one stat from the fifth national survey on sexual harassment in the workplace. Unfortunately, no industry – no workplace for that matter – is immune from workplace bullying or sexual harassment.

The Jenkins report in the federal Parliament found that 51 per cent of Commonwealth parliamentary officers had experienced at least one incident of bullying, harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault. Jenkins also found that 77 per cent of people in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces had experienced, witnessed or heard about bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault – that is 77 per cent. That is huge, and it is absolutely unacceptable. Whilst these statistics relate to federal Parliament, we know that there are similar challenges here in the Victorian Parliament.

At the start of last year we finally saw some codes of conduct applied to all parliamentarians and staffers in the federal Parliament. I have even visited the federal Parliament and seen the little contact cards that are now available all over Parliament House up there. In response to multiple news stories surfacing about misconduct and poor behaviour the federal government established their parliamentary workplace standards service, and governments have been leading by example by holding up higher standards than in other workplaces, and that is the way it should be.

Whilst the federal independent parliamentary standards commission is still six months away, now is the time for us to look, here at the Victorian Parliament, at protecting our parliamentarians and of course our staff. We need to follow the steps of the federal government. All Australian employers now have a legal obligation to implement measures that prevent workplace sexual harassment, thanks to the Commonwealth's respect-at-work legislation. The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission will go a long way to achieving this in our workplace. The commission, along with other measures proposed in the bill, will also address non-sexual instances of harassment and enhance the integrity and transparency of this workplace. Unfortunately, racism is also still an issue. We and all of our staff deserve to work in safe, respectful and accountable work environments.

The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill is an important piece of legislation. It upholds the highest standards of accountability and integrity, and this bill promotes these in a range of ways. The recommendations that were outlined in the Jenkins review have informed this bill. It will establish a Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission to receive, manage, investigate and resolve allegations of misconduct. This will provide an avenue for complaints to be heard and investigated independently and according to due processes. This will be the first legislated parliamentary investigative commission in Australia and the only parliamentary investigative commission which will cover ministers. Later this year the commission will be established, and it will receive, manage and investigate allegations of parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints. A Parliamentary Ethics Committee will also be established in this legislation to foster an ethical parliamentary workplace. We know current arrangements are inadequate and inconsistent with standards in other workplaces. Victorians expect and deserve better from their Parliament. How can we expect the public to trust us if we do not hold ourselves to account to the highest standards and lead by example?

The government is committed to upholding the standards and values reflected in this bill, and as Minister for Women I am very proud that our gender equality strategy, *Our Equal State*, has an entire

pillar dedicated to the safety and respect of all Victorians. *Our Equal State* includes several initiatives designed to improve safety and respect in the workplace. For example, the Allan government is responding to the recommendations made by the ministerial taskforce on workplace sexual harassment. The taskforce was established in March 2021 to develop reforms to prevent and better the response to sexual harassment in Victorian workplaces. This government accepted or accepted in part 21 of the 26 taskforce recommendations. These included continuing to work to restrict the use of non-disclosure agreements for workplace sexual harassment cases in Victoria and ensuring workplace sexual harassment is treated as an occupational health and safety issue.

Last year WorkSafe announced a \$4 million project – which I was really pleased to be at the launch of – the WorkWell Respect Fund, which provides eligible organisations with grants to support projects aimed at preventing work-related gendered violence and sexual harassment. The Victorian government also agreed to advocate to the Commonwealth to implement all 55 recommendations from the *Respect@Work* report and implement any recommendations applicable across Victoria. But now it is time to look at our own workplaces, because a safe and respectful workplace is not negotiable.

Ahead of our local council elections later this year I encourage women to stand up and be heard, stand up and nominate. We need 1000 women to nominate in order to reach our 50 per cent target. No matter what party they are from, what background they are from or what religion they are from, we want them to step up. I know there are issues even across the local government sector around respect in the workplace, and I call on anyone in that sector to support women candidates that are running in the forthcoming election and to make sure that the debate and the campaigns are respectful, because we want to make sure that our equal state is one at all levels of government. Of course we have very proudly achieved that here in the Victorian Parliament – equality when it comes to gender-based representation. That has been very much held up by this side of the house. We want to see that continue across our local government. Of course I commend the federal government on the work that they have done to achieve gender equality – absolutely stunning results they have in the Senate – but also for taking this issue about workplace safety so seriously in adopting the Jenkins report and making the changes and being real leaders on the federal level.

Everyone has a right to a safe workplace, whether you are a teacher, a tradie or a politician. Victorians should have faith that people that they elect to represent them are held to the same high standards as they are. We must lead by example.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (16:50): I rise to speak on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. I do so to make comment initially and say this is a bill that came into the Parliament as a response to the recommendations the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, IBAC, and the Victorian Ombudsman, the VO, made after the handing down of the Operation Watts report, a joint investigation by IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman. This was as a result of the misbehaviour of various Labor MPs and misuse of public resources. I commend and credit the work done by my colleague the Shadow Attorney-General Michael O'Brien in bringing this bill to this stage in the Parliament today. I do also recommend the two amendments that he has put forward. Both of those will make substantial improvements to the bill, and I am confident and hope that the government will take those into consideration and that the moving forward together continues so that we make sure we get this bill right. We all deserve respect in the workplace, and the use of the word 'integrity' is something that I think anyone expects in their workplace and particularly expects of their members of Parliament.

Actions speak louder than words, and I have always felt if you do the right thing you will get the right result. So to see the misuse of funds that we have seen by the Labor Party in the past that this report brings to light does make people in the community feel very disheartened. You see today two previous members of the Labor Party sit now behind me over here, and it is really disappointing that even two years after this report was handed down, when it actually says in the bill that there should be an explanation of behaviours to the public, we have not seen any explanation. I am pretty confident that the people of South-West Coast would expect me to show integrity and to turn up as their

representative in Parliament. It is not an optional thing to turn up here; it is what I need to do to be a representative voice, and the Labor Party have allowed two members to just sit over here – they are never, ever actually there – and the people of Ringwood and the people of South Barwon not to get representation in the Parliament and their voices not to be heard because the members are not present. I think there is an expectation that all our electorates would have of their elected representatives, so it is very disappointing that this conduct has not been identified and explained, as is the recommendation in this bill.

I also think that we should expect integrity. We expect in the workplace respect from employers, and it should be an inclusive and respectful environment. Two weeks ago we had the Premier come into South-West Coast and go and visit the hospital. We were all wondering what was going to be announced, but rather than tell us any news about the developments at the hospital, what we heard was reannounced programs, and the Premier left. Within six days the hospital came out and talked about how the promised scope of the build at the hospital would not actually be delivered by Labor. We would be getting cuts to the scope, we would not be getting areas of the hospital that were scoped out over a 10-year period and had been designed; feasibility studies were conducted and master plans done that we were told we would have to wait patiently for, and we were told we would not get the hospital announcement until they were all done because it had to be meticulously thought through, designed and scoped, even in February. Where is the integrity of the Minister for Health coming and visiting and being asked about that hospital being delivered to scope? We got no answer, and then both the Minister for Health and the Premier came to the electorate within months – within days in the Premier's situation – and left the staff to come out and say that the hospital will not be delivered as promised. It is the most gutless act I have ever seen of a Premier, and it absolutely smacks –

**Nina Taylor:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I just think it is best to adhere to the central tenets of this legislation and the purposive elements of this legislation. I fear that the member is going on a tangent that is not actually fundamentally the purpose for which this legislation was developed.

**Roma BRITNELL:** On the point of order, this is a bill about how we should act in our workplace, this is a bill about how we should be as employers, and what we saw was a Premier, who employs the hospital staff, namely, the CEO, leave that person to actually carry the can and deliver the –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage):** I will rule on the point of order. The member has strayed from the topic of the debate. And if she believes she was still on the topic of debate, she may be skirting close to impugning sitting members, so she may like to reconsider the approach that she is taking.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Do I have the opportunity to talk to you about that later?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage):** You can absolutely speak to the Speaker's office.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Thank you. I will continue on the subject of integrity, which is what this bill is actually titled as, and the behaviours of parliamentarians in their role as politicians and the integrity that should be seen by the public in our behaviours. What I was referring to was the misleading, false and deceptive information that comes from the Labor Party and is delivered to South-West Coast, and I used the example of a hospital that was promised and had the members of Parliament, namely, the Minister for Health and the Premier, come to the region and absolutely avoid the question being asked of them directly and then leaving their staff – nurses, CEOs of hospitals are all staff members of the government. That is exactly what we are discussing here: how we behave in the workplace and the respect that we deserve in the workplace.

That is what I think could be expected by the community of South-West Coast so that they get the respect that they need from their government – when they are promised something, that it is delivered. And when they are told it is going to be built to scope only less than three months ago, or even six days earlier the question being asked and being avoided – that is not something that I think we can call a display of integrity by a government that is expected to govern from border to border, not just within

the confines of the city of Melbourne. There is far more to this state than the city of Melbourne. We should see a government that understands the importance of South-West Coast as well as all the other electorates.

I am very disappointed that we talk about integrity and then we can isolate it to not mean how we deliver, and this government is delivering many misleading, false and deceptive stories to the communities. I have highlighted here one particularly around our hospital which I think is an absolute disgrace, and the Labor Party should be absolutely ashamed of how they have treated the community of South-West Coast and the hospital staff who worked so well in extraordinary conditions. This opportunity to discuss integrity I think highlights the lack of integrity that we witnessed in South-West Coast just last week.

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (16:58): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. If I can take up from where the member for South-West Coast was talking about the conduct in the workplace in general, before being in this place I had my own business and before that I worked in corporate Australia. Throughout having my own business I obviously worked with many other businesses, both clients and suppliers et cetera. Behaviour in business is not always good; behaviour in any organisation is not always good. There are mechanisms in the wider community for dealing with behaviour. It is not always perfect. There is too much bullying that goes on, regardless of whether it is corporate Australia, whether it is the public service, whether it is tribunals – any organisations – and we are no different in this place in that regard. One thing that makes us different, though, is that the 88 of us sitting in this room or the 40 in the other place do not have a boss. You would rightly say that our bosses are the 50,000-odd constituents who, to our great privilege, put us in this place, but we do not have someone that necessarily we answer to on a daily basis in the conduct of our job. This makes us rather unique in our society.

We also have privilege in this place, and that is in fact that we can stand up here and pretty well say anything we like. Yes, there is the Privileges Committee that can deal with abusers of that power, but what we have seen – and I take examples that have been put forward, and I am sure it will be one side and the other side of noted examples of where behaviour has not been acceptable – is the methods of dealing with that unacceptable behaviour have not been clear enough, so I think this bill is a good step in essentially us debating that today. I note that from what I can see – I was not here for all of the member for Malvern's contribution – from looking at the amendments that he put forward, it is not a reasoned amendment, so therefore I would hope that the opposition would not be opposing this bill. I am not going to say they are or they are not, I missed that bit, but I presume they are not. So we are in the strange place that we are policing ourselves and writing a law that will hopefully allow an independent body to do that.

At the same time, we are trying to balance the special privilege that we have in this place to say whatever we like, within reason, within accountability, and so I think this bill is a good balance. We can all talk about the egregious examples there have been in the past from members, and it is not just one side. None of us are perfect. Let us hope none of us in the future make similar mistakes of character, but there is 'there but for the grace of God go we' miscommunication. This bill does hopefully take care of actions against serious misbehaviour, but it also allows a mechanism for what could potentially be called lesser behavioural issues.

Now maybe, and I like to hope with the hopeful passing of this bill, we will actually see with this bill and the integrity adviser that comes with it and the mechanisms of the integrity body cultural change over a period of time, so we do not need to be talking about our own behaviour. It does not matter to me which side of this table we sit on; this is a professional workplace and we should all be professional. We are in a place where we can pretty well say whatever we like, and it does not have to be true, although one would hope it would be. But let us face it, sometimes exaggerations are made. Sometimes the lily is gilded a little bit. Look, that is fine in the sense of debate and the theatre of this Assembly and hundreds of years of tradition – we all accept that. When we are in question time and everyone puts a bit of a slant on things, that is part of the job, but we should all remember at the end of the day

that, especially when we walk outside the little brass line at the bottom of the door there, we are professionals doing a job. Whether it be our own staff, whether it be parliamentary staff or whether it be members of the public who seem aggrieved at something that we may or may not have done, this bill provides a mechanism to find recourse for people who think that they have been mistreated.

Now, it is possible that there may be some in the community who seek to make frivolous complaints, and that, I would think, at some point will probably happen to one of us. I think there is enough in here regarding powers to look at frivolous complaints that we can feel a sense of security, but I would be more concerned, personally, if the focus was not on those who are rightfully aggrieved.

Whilst we have privileges and we have accountability publicly, what this bill does is it says there is somebody else on the beat watching us to make sure that we are fit and proper people to be sitting in this place, and that is a good thing. It is a good thing that we are accountable. Yes, it is another body that has powers, but I think the very ability of this body to be able to look at minor errors of judgement or action means that, if we have not been already – and I am sure most, if not all, of us already have been aware – we should all start being aware that the roles that we do outside this place and within this place are the one thing. We live in a world where we respond to and are accountable to, in my case, 50-odd thousand people. In the other place, it is a lot more. They are our constituents. They have a right to expect that we are professional in nature. They have a right to expect that we uphold and try and live our best by the very laws that we are in this place to create.

I think this bill does a good job. I am also encouraged that we are having a review in two years. That does not mean that I have problems with the bill. What that means is that we are not accepting that it is done and dusted and we move it. Each of the laws that we have got in front of us, in the green books there, we have most likely changed, and the law is a moving feast. I commend the Premier on putting through this bill. I commend the bill to the house. This is a good step forward and will only make this house a more reputable and respected place.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (17:08): Despite varying codes of conduct being in place at different times, it is evident that there have been a number of situations arise that have meant we have had to put into place in this Parliament a workplace standards and integrity bill to deal with them. I think there have been a lot of examples in years gone by where people have seen that behaviour has not been great and things have needed to alter in this place in particular. I was involved during the last Parliament in having a look at some bullying and harassment policies, and I got to understand this area quite a bit. One thing I think that has made a difference in this area, surprisingly, is finishing earlier and people not being in the bar. Apparently the number of incidents that arose – too much poor behaviour – as a result of that in the parliamentary precinct did cause more angst than perhaps there should have been ordinarily.

The bill before us establishes a Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission, a Parliamentary Ethics Committee and a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser. These are to be enshrined in legislation, and each one has a specific role. The Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission will be able to investigate allegations of parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints referred to it, including by IBAC. The Parliamentary Ethics Committee is to be a joint committee to provide confidential advice and training to MPs, ministers and parliamentary secretaries. The Parliamentary Integrity Adviser will foster an ethical parliamentary workplace through the promotion of a members code of conduct and other obligations in Parliament and the community. And of course with all of these bills these are there are consequential and related amendments.

But why are we here? We are here for two purposes. Clearly we need to be told as MPs what is appropriate, what is okay and what is not okay, because not everyone gets that – it is a bit surprising. I would like to think that I uphold high standards of integrity and I behave accordingly, but there are times and places where we have had MPs and ministers – even at the moment – who have been absent from their parliamentary duties and not coming in here. But we are also here because we had an incident that was investigated by the Victorian Ombudsman and IBAC. We had Operation Watts,

which was about a scandal, and this was a scandal in the Labor Party, in one of its factions. Such was the information that was supplied and the investigation that it was obvious that there were some things missing as a result of the bad behaviour. You would think that ordinarily most people would understand what was kosher and was not kosher. Apparently a lot of members in the Labor Party do not understand that, so the Ombudsman and the IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich put out a report, which they tabled, with 21 recommendations.

Operation Watts was about branch stacking and the misuse of public funds for party political purposes. It is really interesting when you look at some of the comments and the quotes. Robert Redlich was quoted as saying this was 'jobs on the public purse' and Deborah Glass, former Ombudsman, found:

... a catalogue of unethical and inappropriate behaviour and concerning practices, and the environment in which such behaviour was able to flourish.

These are pretty significant, and it has led to their recommendations, which the government have no choice but to adopt to show that they are actually starting to do something about this, because for a long time they sat on their hands; they let this behaviour continue to happen.

The behaviours that happened according to Operation Watts: unqualified people were placed in public roles; they were using ministerial officers to support factional work; and there were behaviours of nepotism, forging of signatures, bullying behaviours and attempts to interfere with government grants. This is a culture that leads to corruption. Whilst they could not find hard corruption here, it was evidence that there is a grey zone of soft corruption. The state of the law at the time – the legislation that was there – meant they could not determine criminal conduct. Had the legislation been in place, that may have been a different thing. But they certainly did find that they breached the ministerial code of conduct and the MPs code. So make no mistake that it is the behaviour of the Labor Party and ministers that is really why we are here today, because otherwise the government probably would have continued to sit on their hands.

The Ombudsman in 2018 had the red shirt investigation, and she said that there was a tepid response to that investigation and that little had changed. Several years later she was very keen to see clear, unambiguous conduct, which is part of the reason why the Parliamentary Ethics Committee was born, as well as the independent integrity commissioner.

Now, I want to talk first of all a little bit about the ethics committee. The legislation talks about the make-up of the Parliamentary Ethics Committee in clause 140, which inserts new section 21B. It talks about the number – six, eight or 10 members, so have a bit of a guess there. Half must be members of the Assembly and half must be members of the Council, so it is a joint committee. I would have liked to have seen it said that if you are on the Privileges Committee you are not also on the ethics committee. It does not say that, but I think it would be quite good if that could happen. Not more than half of the committee may be members of a political party forming government. That, I think, is particularly good – but a non-government chair.

With the eligibility of appointment for the commissioner, I want to go back to that for a moment. Section 49 talks about the eligibility for appointment and outlines quite a number of areas where a person should have extensive or specialist knowledge. It lists about eight different areas, including government, community affairs, industrial relations law, dynamics of sexual assault and gender-based violence, public sector governance, public sector ethics and integrity and anything else that the minister considers relevant. If you overlap that with the role of the commissioner in adjudicating, if you like, or undertaking alternative dispute resolution – different dispute resolution mechanisms – there is an entire section on that dispute resolution, and I would have thought that perhaps one of the pieces of expertise or specialist knowledge would have been around dispute resolution, because none of those eight factors that are listed there actually touches on that. I think that is an oversight. Also with the eligibility for appointment, we have somebody being ineligible if at any time in the last five years they have been a member of an Australian Parliament or local council. What we have put forward in the textual amendments that the lead speaker, the member for Malvern, has put here, is to have that

extended to 10 years. Five years is only really the last term, and I think that people need to be further distanced from that. On top of that we have that the members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee do have a right of veto, so if one member out of that committee says that they do not agree with the proposed appointment then that appointment does not go ahead. But I would expect in this case that the government work very closely with the opposition to make sure that they do have somebody appointed in that position or positions who does uphold really high standards of integrity and has the appropriate expertise.

One thing that has always concerned me is confidentiality and how you maintain confidentiality, because we know, and it has been canvassed previously, that there are vexatious litigants out there. There are people who will say certain things just to cause problems for MPs. These can be very frivolous and, as I said, vexatious. It is very difficult if somebody's name gets raised early on through trial by media when there has been a claim like that. One thing that I am pleased but still have a little bit of concern about is that a breach of confidentiality, which is outlined in clause 81, is 120 units. Today that is \$23,000, so you would hope that it does try and maintain the confidential element, but at the same time it is very easy and we see too often that cases end up in the media because somebody goes to the media first before going through the correct processes. So this bill, whilst it may not be perfect, goes some way to addressing some of the extraordinarily poor behaviours that we have seen through Operation Watts.

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (17:18): I am very pleased today to stand here and speak in support of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. This legislation does one simple thing. It sets standards that are fitting for this place. There is no reason why the workplace standards of this place should be weaker than for those who work in any other sector, because a safe and respectful workplace is non-negotiable, whether that is a school, which I have previously worked at, a hospital, where I have also done placement, or here in Parliament. This legislation will establish a new Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission, which will have a key role examining the behaviour of members of Parliament, parliamentary secretaries and ministers, implementing seven recommendations from IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman's report into Operation Watts. This will be the most significant overhaul of parliamentary oversight in the country. This legislation has been drafted after months of consultation since October last year that has been incredibly widespread. We have made sure to include non-government members, and their input has made this bill what it is today.

We have also made sure to include Presiding Officers, clerks, integrity agencies and other experts across law, workplace standards, human rights, equal opportunity and gender equality. I think it is especially important that we have consulted with others that work in this place who are not members of Parliament, because the behaviour of elected members here impacts other workers here beyond our colleagues, such as our own electorate officers, advisory staff and the independent staff here in Parliament.

Before I talk about the new commission, I want to highlight changes this bill will make beyond its establishment. This bill will strengthen Victoria's parliamentary standards and integrity framework by establishing the existing Parliamentary Integrity Adviser in legislation to provide confidential advice and training to elected members. It will also establish a Parliamentary Ethics Committee in legislation, amend the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978, including to update the MP code of conduct to create positive obligations for members to create a safe workplace and demonstrate respect for the commission and the parliamentary adviser. This, to be blunt, should be a bare minimum in any workplace, and this obligation includes a requirement to provide a healthy, safe, respectful and inclusive environment in a workplace that is free from bullying, sexual harassment, assault and discrimination. As a psychologist, I know the impact that these behaviours can have on a person long term, so we need to put this in place. These changes will all make positive impacts in the workplace before we factor in the work of this new integrity commission.

The main purpose of this bill is the establishment of the new Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission. This body will receive, manage, investigate and resolve allegations of parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints. There will be up to three commissioners: one full-time commissioner that will also be the chair of the commission and two that can be appointed on a full-time, part-time or sessional basis. The three-commissioner model is one of the key elements taken from the Jenkins report – namely, the need to have commissioners with the right skills to deal with inappropriate workplace behaviour and improve workplace culture. Commissioners will also be independent and appropriately skilled. A person will not be eligible as a commissioner if they have been in the last five years a member of an Australian Parliament, as we have heard, a local council, a registered political party or on the register of lobbyists. This avoids having commissioners with vested interests and ensures that it remains truly independent. Commissioners will have complementary skills and expertise in areas such as government, industrial relations, law, public sector governance or administration and public sector ethics and integrity, again making sure that the right people hold this very important role.

Under the bill the commission will have jurisdiction to receive complaints about members of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries about parliamentary misconduct. Any person can make a report to the commission, including anonymously. Allowing the commission to receive anonymous complaints will encourage people to report misconduct without fear of reprisal or potential repercussions. This is consistent with recommendations from the Jenkins report and is consistent with complaints to IBAC and Victoria's public interest disclosure scheme.

The commission will promote a 'no wrong door' approach for complaints about misconduct and be able to give and receive referrals to ensure matters are dealt with by the most appropriate integrity body. This includes the commission's ability to receive public interest disclosures about current and former members of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries. The commission will refer these disclosures to IBAC for assessment as the go-to for public interest disclosures, and if IBAC determines that a disclosure is a public interest complaint that also meets the definition of 'parliamentary misconduct', it can refer it back to the commission for investigation.

For current MPs, the bill defines parliamentary misconduct as breaches of the MP code of conduct: a wilful, repeated or deliberate contravention of the members register of interests; a wilful, repeated or deliberate misuse of work-related parliamentary allowances; a wilful, repeated or deliberate misuse of the electorate office and communications budget; and inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour. So it covers quite a lot.

For ministers or parliamentary secretaries, the bill defines parliamentary misconduct as inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour. Parliamentary misconduct applies to former MPs, ministers and parliamentary secretaries if the conduct was engaged in when they were an MP, minister or parliamentary secretary. To protect the rights and wellbeing of all parties involved in reporting and investigation processes, the bill will contain appropriate safeguards on the commission's discretion and powers. The commission will have a power to issue confidentiality notices to protect the privacy, safety, welfare and reputation of those involved in an investigation as the circumstances require. People subject to such notices will still be able to seek advice and support as appropriate.

When dealing with a complaint, the first thing the commission will have to do is to determine whether they have jurisdiction to cover it. This includes complaints made in bad faith, lacking in substance or credibility or related to an allegation of conduct engaged in at a time that is too remote to justify an investigation. The commission will also be able to dismiss complaints already addressed by other relevant bodies, such as law enforcement or IBAC. We all want complaints to be dealt with as quickly as possible and with as little formality as possible, so this will be an important aspect of the commission's framework. It is incredibly important that this body focuses on legitimate concerns and complaints. If the commission decides to investigate or is otherwise required to investigate if a matter is a public interest complaint, the commission will have the appropriate powers to investigate, including the power to request any document, information or other thing that the commission considers



necessary for the investigation and even request a person to attend an interview. Parliament will then have the discretion to decide whether to take any action. The commission will also be able to recommend sanctions for noncompliance as part of its final investigative report.

I could go on and talk about baseless complaints as well, because I know that might be of concern for some in this place. No-one wants the commission dealing with baseless or politically motivated complaints, and as noted earlier the commission will be empowered to dismiss complaints on a range of grounds. The bill also empowers the commission to dismiss complaints if the person who made the complaint has been aware of the alleged conduct for more than 12 months. Under the bill, it is a criminal offence punishable by up to 12 months prison to give false or misleading information to the commission. The bill also has the confidentiality protections to protect the integrity of investigations and the privacy of people involved in a matter.

Given the significance of this legislation, it is appropriate that there is a review of its operation. The bill provides that a statutory review will take place two years after commencement. I was formerly on council, and we recently introduced legislation to ensure that there is appropriate behaviour of our councillors. I do not see why we should not be doing the same for ourselves. As a psychologist, we have a code of conduct as well that we abide by to ensure we maintain appropriate behaviour in our work. Again, I do not see why we as parliamentarians should be exempt from this. I commend the bill to the house.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (17:28): It is a pleasure to rise today on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. I am just looking around the room. It is interesting being one of the newer members of Parliament. I think what I am going to speak to is probably public perception and what the public expects of us. Coming into this place now – I have been here since February last year, so I still have not been here that long – the public really does deserve a better level of behaviour from the people that work in this building. I think it is fair to say a lot of the behaviour over the last decade probably has not passed the pub test. I think as MPs, when we think about what we are doing, quite often we should think in the back of our minds: does this pass a pub test?

This bill has obviously been introduced on the back of Operation Watts and the recommendations from Operation Watts. I will not read through all 21 recommendations, but there were some pretty serious recommendations in there that we should not ignore. We should have a higher standard of behaviour. The Victorian public expect more from us. They expect us to operate professionally. They expect our behaviour to pass the pub test. Even if we go back to 2014 and we talk about the red shirts – I was not very political in 2014, I was not even a member of the Liberal Party in 2014 – from a general public person's perspective, from me not knowing anything about it, that did not pass the pub test. I think a lot of these recommendations are based around these behaviours that we have seen going on over the last decade. Like chauffeuring your dogs in a ministerial vehicle to somewhere, wherever it was in the state, it is fair to say no-one thought that would pass the pub test.

So these recommendations and this bill coming on the back of Operation Watts I think are a step in the right direction. Obviously we do not oppose this bill, but we do have some amendments that the Shadow Attorney-General has put forward that I think are fair and reasonable. I do not think they are arduous amendments, and we do have a reserved position in the upper house. The amendment to have a veto right on the appointment of acting commissioners and commissioners – that is very important, because if we are going to establish this commission, we have got to choose the people in charge of this commission in a bipartisan manner and we have to make sure they are people of the ultimate integrity. I mean, they are judging our behaviour, so we do not want their behaviour to be tarnished in any way. I think it is actually important that there is that veto to say, 'Well, we don't think they're quite the right fit,' or 'They might have too many political connections, so there could be bias there.' I think that is really important.

Victorians really want this to happen. Let us be realistic, I think Victorians have had enough. They have had enough of the reports, they have enough of the headlines, so they want this to happen. We

really do need to get this right, and where we have to start is with the commissioners. They have to be the right people. That is why also the other amendment, which I have here, is to increase the time that a potential commissioner appointee is required to have not been an MP, councillor, lobbyist et cetera from five years to 10 years. I think that is quite important as well, because you need to get that disconnect. As stated earlier, it might have been by the member for Eildon, five years is just one term out if it is going to be an MP. So I think 10 years is quite a good timeframe. It gives time for that person to step back and away from all their positions and everything else. To have a truly, truly independent commissioner is going to be very important for this actual commission to work. I truly believe that. I think it is very important.

I could beat up on several people over the way they have behaved in the past and the things that have gone on, but I do not necessarily want to do that. What I want to see happen and what I think the Victorian people want to see happen is that we get this right. As the Leader of the Nationals said earlier, if you do not want a speeding fine, do not speed. It is quite a simple analogy, but it is true. If you do not want to end up in front of this commission, do not do the wrong thing. That is what Victorians expect from us. But I do understand too that there are some people out there that are litigious, vexatious or however you want to say it, and we have probably got them on both sides. You will see them on your Facebook feed; it is not that hard to find them. So there is a chance that you will get dragged in front of this commission for a very frivolous, false or vexatious claim. The commissioner has the right to deal with that as outlined in the body of the bill.

The member for Bentleigh said it, and I will reference him. He actually said that when we come into Parliament our life changes because you are more aware of your behaviour as a parliamentarian than you are as a normal person out on the street. People watch what you do. They watch how you behave, so you do have this elevated sense of: am I doing the right thing? So it is very important that we do have in the bill that vexatious claims can be dealt with in a way that does not drag the reputation down of an MP who really has not done anything wrong but has got caught up by someone that is bearing a grudge. That, unfortunately, will probably happen, I imagine. There will be someone out there with a grudge, and once this commission gets set up, someone will use it for those means.

I think this is a step in the right direction, especially on the back of Operation Watts and the recommendations from IBAC and the Ombudsman. It was a fairly extensive report, and it did raise some pretty big red flags that we need to deal with. I did say this on the government business program this morning: it is interesting, or it is a little bit ironic, that now we are introducing a bill because of past behaviour of the government, tongue in cheek or however you want to say that, this is how this has come about, and this is why we need this bill to clean these things up and to have a process to deal with these things when they do come around.

In closing on this – and I probably will not go on for too much longer – a member mentioned that we have to be fit and proper to do our job, and I agree with that. We do have to have fit and proper people in this place, because we do represent the people of Victoria, all 88 seats – that is what we represent – and 40 seats in the other place. We do have to have this in place to ensure that that still happens into the future. Unfortunately, MPs will make mistakes. We are only human, and we will make mistakes. Hopefully, those mistakes that are not deliberate will be dealt with properly and confidentially, and I think that is very important. The confidentiality side of this is very important, that the person is not embarrassed publicly for making a simple mistake, because we are only human, and it will happen to someone in this chamber or someone in the other chamber.

The Shadow Attorney-General's amendments are fair and reasonable, and as he said, we have a reserve position in the upper house because we want to get these amendments through. He also talked about the legal representation of MPs. I think he said earlier in his contribution that you cannot have one rule for one and different rules for others. It is either all in or nobody is in, and I think that is a very valid point. I think every MP in here can find that fair and reasonable. In saying that, I will end my contribution there. I encourage the government to work with the Shadow Attorney-General to get those amendments up, because as I said, we do have a reserve position in the other place.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:38): I too am pleased to speak on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024, noting that if you look at the purpose behind it – and I will try to start with the positive end in the sense that it is to promote the highest standards of accountability, integrity and behaviour of all members of Parliament, including ministers and parliamentary secretaries – if you think about bringing Parliament into the contemporary space when it comes to workplaces, if you look at other arrangements and standards in other workplaces, which is the point I am trying to get to, Parliament has got to be in that frame as well within the caveats et cetera that one would anticipate because it is the Parliament. But at the same time appropriate workplace behaviour and making sure that it is safe and respectful are non-negotiable.

I should note that we should not underestimate – I do not think anyone does actually – the significance of these reforms and the extensive consultation that has been undertaken to make sure they are drafted as sensitively and as appropriately as absolutely possible within the context of human behaviour, noting humans can make mistakes but at the same time of course we have to have appropriate workplace boundaries.

The point I was trying to get to, when we look at how significant these changes are, is that this will be the most significant overhaul of parliamentary oversight in the country. I am not saying that in any way to inflate it if we are looking at how fantastic or otherwise the legislation is. Rather, I am just stating that these are really important reforms – they are significant reforms – and we are breaking new ground here for our Parliament. I think that should not be underestimated, bearing in mind that there are necessary caveats, for good reason, to mitigate the risk of unnecessary litigation that might actually be counterproductive and not in any way further the betterment of the community within which we live or help to improve parliamentary behaviour at the same time.

When we look at the types of complaints that can be brought about – I do want to revisit this element, and I know there will have been others who have spoken to this – I thought there may have been a bit of a deviation in terms of the central premise of the types of complaints that can be brought pursuant to this legislation. I do not think it hurts to revisit that in this context. We really are talking about parliamentary misconduct, so what is that? In relation to any current MP the bill defines parliamentary misconduct as breaches of the MP code of conduct; a wilful, repeated or deliberate contravention of the members register of interests; a wilful, repeated or deliberate misuse of work-related parliamentary allowances; a wilful, repeated or deliberate misuse of the electorate office and communications budget; and inappropriate parliamentary workplace behaviour. If you look at the frame within which this is set – and I was reviewing this in my preparation for the bill – when it comes to the register of interests and all these other elements being transactionally transparent but also accurate in declarations is absolutely critical and reasonable.

Another element that has to underpin this legislation is reasonableness when we are looking at the behaviour of colleagues and the like. I do not think it is unreasonable to have that element underpinning this legislation. I do not mean to make light of it, but when we look at the law more generally there is that frame of reasonableness. We are not trying to extract a standard of behaviour that is impossible for an MP to meet, so to speak, if I were to reverse the emphasis here. On the contrary, having said that, and I think it has been mentioned in the chamber, MPs are well used to having pretty high levels of scrutiny of anything and everything that we do, and that does come with the territory within which we operate. Having said that, I think we are human, but at the same time, having appropriate workplace boundaries and ensuring that we have inclusive and supportive workplaces that are free from bullying and harassment makes good common sense and certainly brings the Parliament into a very clear frame in the contemporary working environment that we all operate in.

A couple of other points that I want to make clear are that with regard to the commission, and there is a lot more information to be transacted with regard to the commission for obvious reasons, when we look at some of the parameters within which this legislation is designed to operate the commission will also have discretion to dismiss a complaint that has already been dealt with by an integrity body, a law enforcement agency, an entity with the power to require the production of documents or the

answering of questions, or a prescribed entity. I do not wish to presume the complete rationale underpinning that, save for the fact that, further to the point, where a matter has already been very well transacted there is no need necessarily to keep transacting it over and over again when an authoritative body has already assessed it appropriately. I am proffering that that would be the rationale underlying that particular element of the frame within which the commission operates, so I hope that makes sense as well.

I know that some of my colleagues have already mentioned some of the sanctions, and the importance of that is of course that these matters have to be enforceable, and for the community to respect the clarity which we are seeking to bring before the chamber in terms of workplace standards, they need to know that there actually are mechanisms to enforce the standards which we are seeking to have met on a consistent basis. There are a range of sanctions. I will not go through all of them, but it could be issuing a public apology in a manner and a form determined by the commission; giving a written apology or explanation to an affected person; participating in an education or training program determined by the commission; or participating in mediation with an affected person. So you can see the range of behaviours there that no doubt are finding a way to effect an outcome to remedy situations relative to the gravity or otherwise that has been proven or brought before the commission themselves.

The other point that I was going to make, if I could actually read my writing, is with the appointment of commissioners and oversight – I know there were some comments made about making sure there is appropriate objectivity when it comes to the commissioners themselves – they will of course be independent officers of the Parliament consistent with the classifications of the heads of other independent bodies, such as the Commissioner of IBAC and the Ombudsman. I know people have referred to the Ombudsman and others alike here, referencing certain commentary, so I think we can see that there will be significant rigour in the appointment of commissioners, when you look at the frame within which they will have to be selected and operating. The bill also sets out the skills and experience for commissioners, making sure that they have the appropriate qualifications and experience to handle matters with the relative sensitivity but also applying the law appropriately and respectfully, such as specialist knowledge of or expertise in matters including public sector ethics and integrity, industrial relations or the dynamics of sexual assault and other gender-based violence. You can see that these matters, in terms of the selection and appropriateness of commissioners, has been very thoroughly considered, as it should be, in order again to have the confidence of community when it comes to the way in which any matters that may be brought before the commission are handled so that they can have confidence in the decision-making processes and the outcomes that result.

We would like to think that none of these matters have to be transacted, but of course we have to have these measures in place in the event that there is inappropriate behaviour from members of Parliament, and on that premise I will have to say that I think it gives confidence to us all to know – and I do not want to speak for others, but if I speak personally – that there are clear processes, that we have the requisite independence et cetera for the selection of commissioners. There has been extensive consultation, and I commend this bill to the house.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (17:48): I always say it is a pleasure to make a contribution to bills that seek to improve political integrity in this place, so rarely am I afforded the opportunity to do so. Because it is fair to say that of the many achievements under a decade of Victorian Labor, which I readily acknowledge, a genuine commitment to strengthening political integrity is unfortunately not yet among them, either as an operating principle of the government or as a legislative priority. Indeed the very reason that we are here today debating this bill to establish a parliamentary integrity commission is because the former Premier made a captain's call to go against the advice of his former Special Minister of State and reject the creation of this office back in 2019, and then, along with the Liberal Party, voted down Greens' amendments to create this office. But it gets worse, because instead of creating a parliamentary commissioner, the former Premier reinstated to the front bench an MP he described as his good friend, despite said MP previously being stood down for workplace bullying and inappropriate physical contact with a female staffer. So we did not get an integrity commissioner in

2019, but we did reappoint a Labor minister who had previously repeatedly engaged in the kinds of egregious workplace behaviour that this bill defines as ‘serious parliamentary misconduct’.

Unsurprisingly, this captain’s call did not work out so well – not politically for the Labor Party and not for local government and councillors, who continue to suffer from Mr Somyurek’s reforms as a minister, but most of all not for the reputation of the entire Victorian Parliament and the public’s perception of and trust in Victorian politicians. Consider the fact that were it not for some good journalism in the media, it is likely that Mr Somyurek would still be a Victorian Labor minister and he would still be meddling with the Local Government Act 2020, would still be misusing parliamentary resources and likely would still be bullying his staff and parliamentary colleagues with his trademark bigotry and misogyny. Such is the pernicious power of the Labor Party’s factionalism and branch stacking that even the most autocratic Premier in a generation felt obliged to not just tolerate such behaviour but actively reward it with a seat in his cabinet.

There is no better example of why we need a strong, independent anti-corruption commission, or Ombudsman, than the events uncovered in Operation Watts. But also we need strong parliamentary investigatory committees, including the privileges committees, which importantly are free from interference by the government and executive of the day. It shows why Victorian politics have needed for a long time the parliamentary integrity and behaviour commission that is proposed in this bill. We cannot know whether or not the behaviour uncovered during that IBAC investigation would have been prevented had the government not blocked the creation of this office in 2019, but it certainly would have helped. We also now know that the release of the Operation Watts report did not put an end to misconduct but merely marked an outrageous example of ongoing inappropriate behaviour, or grey-level corruption, from Labor government MPs since its release. Incredibly, we saw with IBAC’s Operation Clara how the venality of some Labor factional figureheads persists even after they have left the Victorian Parliament.

Of course no party or government or Parliament is immune from a toxic culture and bad workplace behaviour, even if Victoria appears to have become a showcase for these practices. So I am glad that this bill also incorporates some of the lessons from other jurisdictions, most notably the findings of the Jenkins report from the Australian Human Rights Commission. I also want to recognise that the government has engaged in the type of genuine consultation across the Parliament before introducing this bill that, in my opinion, does not happen nearly enough. I particularly want to recognise Mike Williams from the Premier’s office in this regard. While I have felt obliged to call out the recent poor culture and behaviour of some Labor MPs, because this is what ultimately led to this bill being introduced, it is important I also recognise the many current Labor MPs, ministers and staff members of integrity who, along with everyone in Victorian politics, have been unfortunately sullied by what I truly hope is the behaviour and attitude of a few.

Obviously the Victorian Greens, who have been championing the reforms in this bill for half a decade, welcome the government finally introducing this bill, which we will be supporting. But under standing orders, I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

#### **Amendments circulated under standing orders.**

**Tim READ:** I will just speak briefly to these amendments circulated today and why I believe they should be supported. Clause 30 of the bill provides that the commission may impose sanctions on the Premier, a member, a parliamentary secretary or a minister where it has made a finding of parliamentary misconduct that is not serious parliamentary misconduct. We are talking here about relatively less serious cases where the commission can directly impose a sanction on a member, such as a requirement they issue an apology. But I do believe there is a small oversight in the current bill where it does not provide for circumstances when a member who receives a direct sanction under clause 30 refuses to comply with the sanction imposed on them by the commission. My amendments propose to allow the commission to further investigate and report should a member fail to comply with any sanctions previously imposed on them by the commission under clause 30. The amendment

further clarifies that such noncompliance can constitute serious parliamentary misconduct, effectively upgrading an initial finding of non-serious parliamentary misconduct against a member.

I also wish to flag today that as this bill moves to the other place, the Greens will have further amendments to improve the integrity and operation of parliamentary committees, which I will also summarise. Operation Watts contains significant discussion on the current problems and ineffectiveness of the privileges committees in investigating MP misconduct and recommending sanctions. Recommendation 3a of the Watts report is unambiguous that:

the privileges committees of each House be reformed to dilute the capacity of the majority in each House to determine the privileges committees' priorities and decision making

Likewise, the government were clear and unequivocal that they would support all the recommendations of Operation Watts, including specifically bringing legislation to reform the privileges committees before the Parliament. Given this commitment, it is rather surprising the government has had an apparent change of heart on reforming the composition of the privileges committees, which does not appear in this bill. So the Greens will introduce amendments in the other place to acquit recommendation 3 of Operation Watts by amending the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 to provide that not more than half the members of the respective privileges committee in each house may be members of a political party forming the government and that the chairperson of a privileges committee must not be a member of a political party forming the government.

But we will go further by introducing these same amendments so that they will apply to all of Parliament's investigatory committees to ensure their independence from the government of the day. This is particularly important for the Integrity and Oversight Committee, which is proposed to have significant additional oversight functions of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission in this bill, including a veto power over the minister's proposed appointment of a commissioner. It simply defies logic that the bill requires that the proposed new ethics committee must be composed in a way to be independent of the government of the day but leaves the Integrity and Oversight Committee, which has far greater responsibility in monitoring and overseeing the overall integrity framework proposed in the bill, without this requirement. For the same reason the oversight functions and veto powers of all joint investigatory committees must be sufficiently independent from the government they scrutinise, and I note the comments earlier today from the member for Malvern along these lines.

I confess these amendments also represent something of a test for this Labor government under the leadership of a new Premier purportedly determined to turn over a new leaf from some of the unacceptable behaviours of the past. If this new Allan Labor state government is now genuine about improving parliamentary standards and the integrity of Parliament, about upholding that almost forgotten democratic notion of good government, meaning that it holds itself transparent and accountable to the people's representatives in this Parliament, then it will support the Greens amendments and reform parliamentary investigatory committees. If it does not, we can safely assume that once again it is trying to get away with implementing the minimum amount of integrity reform possible only because one of its ministers was found out, because a good government that is genuine about improving political integrity does not wait for the corruption scandal, the resultant political fallout and the IBAC recommendations before it belatedly acts and because a good integrity system is not designed retrospectively by a government playing whack-a-mole in response to its own scandals, especially when there is so much in Victoria still to improve on with integrity.

The former Premier possibly thought he had dodged a bullet when he shut down the push to establish a parliamentary integrity and behaviour commission in 2019. He probably thought that by shielding his government and ministers from greater scrutiny and keeping this Parliament's behavioural standards low he was better able to avoid pesky questions of integrity and get stuff done. But what actually occurred instead was that the litany of poor behaviour of Labor MPs and ministers simply grew until it was too big to ignore. The end result was not good for the Parliament, for the people who

work in Parliament and for our reputation as parliamentarians working for the public good, and if you want to analyse it in blunt political terms, the end result also became one of the major political liabilities for the Andrews Labor government and the Victorian Labor Party. By the same token, the government may think that blocking Greens amendments which seek to increase accountability and transparency represents a win for them, but I would suggest that in the long term all of us, especially the government, ultimately lose from holding ourselves to lower political standards.

I can say, however, that I have been encouraged by my conversations across the Parliament on ways in which we can improve this bill. I genuinely hope that this results in a bipartisan commitment to strengthening this integrity legislation even further. I urge all of us in this place not to waste this opportunity for genuine reform. Let us all take the worst Victorian political behaviour exposed by Operation Watts and make it the catalyst for improving the standards, integrity and functions of our Parliament and parliamentarians. The Greens commend the bill, and our amendments to enhance it, to the house.

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (18:00): I am very pleased to be able to join the debate on this important bill, the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. At the outset I just want to comment on a number of contributions that have been made in this debate today, starting with the lead speaker from the opposition right through now until the considered contribution from the member for Brunswick. There has been a theme running through the contributions from non-government members today that I would characterise as being that all of the bad behaviour of members of Parliament has been Labor members of Parliament and therefore these changes are being implemented. There has been an inability to resist the temptation to take the political cheap shots as opposed to looking at this bill as an opportunity to have a discussion as parliamentarians about lifting the standards and reassuring the Victorian community about the standards to which the vast majority of members of Parliament adhere as they practise their vocation and go about their business in a way that the community would expect.

But of course it is important to point out that the characterisation that poor behaviour only resides on this side of the house is entirely incorrect. I had the privilege of sitting in that chair as Speaker for about five years and seeing a range of things come to my attention – not that I will share in this place. I respect the confidentiality of a whole range of matters, but let me assure you that there have been publicised and non-publicised matters that apply to members of every party in this place – whether that be Labor Party, Liberal Party, National Party or the Greens – of which none of us would be proud. So I think it is disingenuous for anyone from any party in this place to suggest that these reforms have been brought forward by a government because of behaviour of its own members. Certainly that has contributed to it. I think it is important that we are honest enough to say that, but I am absolutely of the view that there are behaviours across all sides of this chamber that need to be reformed, and I think this bill is an incredibly important step forward in doing just that.

This is a comprehensive piece of legislation establishing a Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission. This is a really important step forward, a place where people can take concerns about the behaviour of people in the parliamentary workplace. It is important for parliamentarians, all of us, to be cognisant of the fact that the parliamentary workplace extends beyond the parliamentary precinct and our electorate offices to basically wherever we are performing our parliamentary duties – turning up to give a report at your local branch meeting about parliamentary proceedings, attending public meetings as a member of Parliament. So members will be wary of that and mindful of that as they go about their work.

I am glad to see included in the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 the insertion of a set of words that places an obligation on members. To quote:

A Member must foster a healthy, safe, respectful and inclusive environment in the parliamentary workplace, free from bullying, sexual harassment, assault and discrimination.

One would have hoped that we did not need to set out that requirement, but it is important that it is there, I think. We have seen examples of poor behaviour where there is no doubt that we have to be really clear. We have to put in black ink in the legislation the sorts of things that we want to see and the sorts of things that we do not want to see in terms of parliamentary behaviour.

I think one of the key aspects, one of the really important aspects, of this bill will be the ability of people to seek confidential advice about what might be considered to be minor matters – things that they are concerned about but certainly are not at the end of the scale that might be serious criminal matters. I think in many workplaces behaviours of particular individuals can escalate from minor things to repeated minor things and then continue on and cause great distress to other people who work in that workplace, particularly when we work in an environment where there is a significant power imbalance. Sometimes I think we forget as members of Parliament the power imbalance that exists here between members of Parliament and other staff who see parliamentarians differently. It is not something that we reflect on very much, I do not think, but it exists, and I have seen it play out, as I said, in my previous role as Speaker where people were too scared to raise issues about members of Parliament. Because of that perceived power imbalance, they do not think it is something they can do. I think this new commission will provide an opportunity for people to be able to speak up in confidence and raise issues in a way that they know might be dealt with informally, if they are not that serious, and those matters are then resolved. I think that is a good outcome for people in this workplace. It is also a good outcome for members of Parliament who might be making a mistake, but not yet making serious mistakes, for them to have the commission let them know that they might need to undertake training or make an apology and hopefully they correct the actions that they are taking.

The establishment of the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser is another really important part of this legislation. I think a key aspect of the work of that needs to be training, so I am hoping to see a significant amount of training provided to members – not just new members but all members, because I think sometimes, particularly in relation to some of the behaviours we have seen, it is about members not having appropriate training around what the processes are and the particular requirements that they are expected to adhere to. Again, one would hope that we did not need to have training around some of those really basic standards, but I think the fact that we have now got this integrity adviser – when this legislation passes, hopefully – that will be enshrined in legislation and they will have the ability to run training programs. I hope that there is a commitment from all of the parties to encourage members to participate in that training. I think the Parliament has run over a number of years different training courses for members of Parliament and it is important for members to attend those. Sometimes not everybody does, and I think party leadership on all sides of the Parliament has a responsibility to encourage and ensure that all members undertake that sort of training.

I just want to move back to the origins of some of this work. The member for Eildon touched on this earlier on, and I was pleased to hear her contribution on this matter. This work obviously flows from Operation Watts, but prior to that in the last Parliament there was an informal working group that was established, a bipartisan group, to do some work on putting in place a framework to address issues of sexual harassment and bullying. This is, I suppose, the precursor work to the work that took place once Operation Watts had made some recommendations. That working group looked at best practice in other parliaments. It recognised the power imbalances I was talking about before. It consisted of, along with me and with the support of the President – and there were two presidents during this time, Mr Leane and Mr Elasmir – also the member for Dandenong, and I also want to acknowledge the member for Rowville and the member for Eildon, who put in a significant amount of work to work through those issues. Many of those issues have been picked up through the rest of this work that has now come to the Parliament. That was a really important piece of work not just for the development of a framework which eventually was put to government and other party leaders, but also to the Ombudsman through consultation in informing recommendations that the Ombudsman and IBAC ultimately made in Operation Watts to combine these roles into a member behaviour framework and into what we see now in terms of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill.



I also want to acknowledge Steph Ryan, who was the member for Euroa. She played a role in that work as well, albeit briefly, and also the former member for Ripon Louise Staley was involved in some of that work. It was a good example of bipartisan work to address some issues that we all had concerns about, and it worked reasonably well. I also want to acknowledge the support of Jason McDonald in that process, who was my adviser in the Speaker's office; the clerks of the Parliament; the Department of Parliamentary Services; and also some learned advice from Derek Humphrey-Smith and Annika Anderson-Carter, who worked at the legal firm which assisted the Parliament in doing that work. In particular I want to acknowledge the many people in the parliamentary staff who came forward with examples and suggestions for improvements, and I want to recognise the courage that they showed in bringing those to my attention.

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (18:10): I rise to speak on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. The bill establishes three new bodies: firstly, a Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission to investigate allegations of parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints referred to it from IBAC; two, a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, or PIA, to provide confidential advice and training to MPs, ministers and parliamentary secretaries; and three, a Parliamentary Ethics Committee to foster an ethical parliamentary workplace and promote the members code of conduct and other obligations in Parliament and in the community.

This bill is very important because everyone deserves the right to a safe workplace. There is no-one in this place that denies that; we are all in agreement that everyone deserves the right to a safe workplace. Everyone deserves the right to raise complaints when they feel unsafe. This bill is also important because maintaining political face cannot come at the expense of justice when people have done the wrong thing. Those who have done the wrong thing, no matter their role in this place, must be held to account. The commission can take complaints and referrals from anyone, and this is good, allowing for everyone's voice to be heard. Sanction and recommendation powers of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission include, for parliamentary misconduct, the PWIC can impose sanctions such as a public apology, written apology, education or training or mediation; entering into a behaviour agreement with Presiding Officers; and for serious misconduct the committee can only recommend actions to the Parliament or the Premier. For MPs' serious parliamentary misconduct the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission can recommend withdrawal of services or removal of access, discharge from a parliamentary committee, a penalty in accordance with the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 and any other sanction the PWIC considers appropriate.

So that is the bill that we are speaking of today, and what I would like to say is on this side of the house we are champions of integrity and workplace standards, unlike Labor which attacked integrity agencies such as former IBAC commissioner Robert Redlich and former Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass, cutting their funding and reducing their powers. The Liberals and Nationals were the ones to actually establish IBAC, believe it or not, and have championed integrity in government and in Parliament. Yes, you heard it – the Liberals and Nationals were the ones to establish IBAC. I am relieved to see that this form of the bill has taken into account so many of the suggestions of the coalition compared to earlier drafts. In fact the Liberals and Nationals are always willing to be there to hold the hand of the government when it comes to matters of integrity. As leaders in our communities, members of Parliament ought to be leaders in integrity for the people of this state. We should be held to a higher standard, not a lower standard. I am glad that this bill reflects this high standard and will hold members of this place to account for their actions.

So why is it that we need this bill? What is the reality that we are debating in this place? It is not because of the issue across the Parliament, but it is actually a pervasive issue in the government that we are addressing with this bill and that we are redressing with this bill, and it was covered earlier today by our lead speaker, the Shadow Attorney-General the member for Malvern. I will list the examples again here, where we have seen example after example, time after time, of misbehaviour from those on the other side: a former Speaker and Deputy Speaker who rorted their second-residence

allowances and claimed to be living in Queenscliff and a caravan park respectively despite representing western suburbs seats – Mr Languiller and Mr Nardella. I will list another one: former Labor minister Steve Herbert, who used his ministerial car and driver to transport his two dogs Patch and Ted from Trentham to Melbourne. What about the red shirts scandal, which involved 21 Labor members of Parliament, and the government then tried to prevent the scandal coming to light by taking the Victorian Ombudsman to the High Court of Australia. That is great integrity for you! That is sarcasm, for *Hansard*. These members of Parliament were found to have stolen over \$388,000 from taxpayers, which they were forced to repay. Examples, as I say, time and again – and we have got the member for Mordialloc in this place, who also used stamps that were not his or paid for by him to run his election campaign, as well as the Labor member in the other place who assigned the use of his electorate car to his former wife as part of a divorce settlement. The car was then used as a getaway vehicle in a shoplifting ring. And then I speak of more recent incidents we have seen involving two former Labor members that are now sitting in this corner, the member for Ringwood and the member for South Barwon. So may I suggest that perhaps the clean-up needs to start in their own house, on their own side, before they try to clean up the whole of Parliament.

Why else has this issue come to light? Well, it is increasing focus on parliamentary misconduct at a state and federal level, including the Operation Watts investigation, which was initiated at the behest of our side of the house. Thankfully we on this side do actually care about integrity. Operation Watts investigated abusive use of publicly funded resources by Labor members of Parliament and ministers, including electorate officers and ministerial staff.

That aside, and back to the content of this bill, one outstanding issue remains the question of whether and how MPs should be able to be supported in relation to the costs of seeking legal advice and representation if they are the subject of a complaint. Given the prospect that ministers subjected to a complaint may have their legal costs covered by the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, there needs to be some parity for other MPs. Either ministers should bear the cost for commission-related matters or all MPs, both government and opposition, should be treated on an equal footing. The government has acknowledged that this is a live issue, and it appears that government backbench MPs are similarly concerned. However, we have been advised by the government that this issue will require a policy response rather than a legislative one.

Therefore we on this side of the house propose also an amendment to increase the time a potential commissioner appointment is required to not have been an MP, councillor, lobbyist et cetera from five years to 10 years. We propose an amendment to clause 58 so that the Integrity and Oversight Committee has a unanimous right of veto on the appointment of an acting commissioner. The government wanted the appointment to be by a majority, and then they walked it back to two-thirds, and then we on this side of the house pushed for it to be unanimous, because we cannot let the Labor government stack it like they do their branches.

In closing, the truth of the matter is that the recent issues within the government are what have led us to needing this bill and the prompting of this bill. It is about time, and, with the Shadow Attorney-General the member for Malvern's proposed amendments, I welcome this bill.

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (18:18): I am proud and pleased to rise to contribute to the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. Just in response to some of what we have heard from the other side – and I am not going to name names of MPs that have done the wrong thing or been put into a position where they can no longer be a member of a particular party – for those opposite to make this only about Labor Party MPs is absolutely hypocritical. The difference here is that the Labor Party or the Labor government have actually dealt with the situations as they have arisen and have dealt with them appropriately. The former Premier and the current Premier have all dealt with situations that have arisen. However, those opposite have not dealt with any of the issues. I can think of four or five offhand that should not be sitting over on that side in this house or the upper house but continue to do so because those complaints were ignored.

Those opposite have not dealt with the situations that have arisen, unlike what we have done on this side – yes, it has been painful, but we have dealt with it – so for those opposite to criticise the Labor government is ridiculous. What we are doing here now is setting out a process to ensure that there is a system in place for these matters to be dealt with. I agree with the comments from the member for Bundoora that it does happen on all sides. Politics should not be brought into this. This is about making things right in this place, and we know it has been lacking. There has been an enormous amount of consultation with many people, and I want to thank all those involved in having this bill presented to us today for debate, because we need to make sure we get it right, and that is exactly what we have got here on the table today.

The purpose of this bill is to promote the highest standards of accountability, integrity and behaviour for all members of Parliament, including ministers and parliamentary secretaries. Everyone has a right to a safe and respectful workplace; there is no doubt of that. I think our communities expect that. No matter where you work – whether it is in a shop, a construction site, a hospital or within the Parliament; whether you are a member of Parliament or whether you are one of the parliamentary staff – we all deserve that respect and to be treated in such a way that is acceptable in our community. For all the years this Parliament has been here and the number of members that have gone through this place, we are now bringing it into a modern age where we do actually have a system in place to ensure that people know where to go to lodge a complaint and there is an investigation that takes place.

These reforms will ensure Victoria's parliamentary system operates with the highest standards of accountability and integrity, and as I said, that is what Victorians expect. It is a system that ensures matters are dealt with, and that anyone with a complaint knows that there is a process and how to go about that. The new Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission will have a key role in examining the behaviour of members of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries, including bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and victimisation. After the comments from those opposite, maybe something will be done with those who have not been brought to the attention that they deserve. The new Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission will have a key role in examining the behaviour of members of Parliament. This will provide a critical avenue for complaints to be heard and investigated through a proper process. We know current arrangements are inadequate and inconsistent with standards in other workplaces, and we should not be any different to them. The model in the bill draws on the groundbreaking work of the Australian Human Rights Commission's Jenkins report and allows the commission to investigate the behaviour of MPs.

I want to outline some of the key features of the bill. As noted, the bill will establish a Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission to receive, manage, investigate and resolve allegations of parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints. The bill will also strengthen Victoria's parliamentary standards and integrity framework by establishing the existing Parliamentary Integrity Adviser in legislation to provide confidential advice and training to members of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries. As the member for Bundoora pointed out earlier, there probably is a real need to have that training and for new members to understand what the expectations are and that level of respect and how to go about making a complaint if it does arise. It will establish a Parliamentary Ethics Committee in legislation to foster an ethical parliamentary workplace, amend the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 to update the MP code of conduct to create positive obligations for members to create a safe workplace and demonstrate respect for the commission and Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, and amend other relevant acts to integrate the commission and Parliamentary Integrity Adviser into Victoria's existing parliamentary standards and integrity framework.

Under the bill members of Parliament will have a positive obligation to foster a healthy, safe, respectful and inclusive environment in the parliamentary workplace that is free from bullying, sexual harassment, assault and discrimination. This is what Victoria expects and deserves of its elected representatives. I have to say, when we move about our electorates – and I am sure other members are the same – we are role models to many people, particularly young people when we go out to schools

and we talk about our role in the Parliament. So I think it is important that we have this in place and that members are mindful of their behaviour and the respect that others deserve. If we do not do that, what sort of role modelling are we showing particularly to young people in our communities that do look up to us? Members of Parliament will also be required to demonstrate respect for parliamentary standards, including respecting the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission, for example, by complying with a reasonable request that is made.

A new independent Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission is a key feature of the bill. This will have up to three commissioners – one full-time commissioner, who will also be the chair of the commission, and two that can be appointed on a full-time or part-time or sessional basis. The three commissioners model is one of the key elements taken from the Jenkins report, namely the need to have commissioners with the right skills to deal with inappropriate workplace behaviour and improve workplace culture. Commissioners will also be independent and appropriately skilled. A person will not be eligible as a commissioner if they have been in the last five years a member of an Australian parliament, local government or registered political party or on the register of lobbyists. Commissioners will have complementary skills and expertise in areas such as government, industrial relations, law, public sector governance or administration and public sector ethics and integrity.

Under the bill the commission will have jurisdiction to receive complaints about members of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries and about parliamentary misconduct. We also need to be mindful of the frivolous complaints that are likely to come up. I am sure the conspiracy theorists in my electorate will lodge a complaint because there is a 5G tower right next to my office, which means they cannot come to my office. I am sure there will be those sorts of ones.

**Juliana Addison:** The Lord works in mysterious ways.

**Chris COUZENS:** Yes, that's right. I am very happy about that, I have got to say. But there will be those frivolous complaints that I am sure the commission will deal with. But in a serious way we need to look at ensuring that people can go through this process and have confidence in the fact that their complaints will be considered seriously. This is a really important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:28):** I rise to speak on the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. I do only intend to make a number of comments. The community have and should have an expectation that their members of Parliament behave appropriately and with the highest standard of behaviour – of course they should – not that everybody expects members of Parliament to be perfect, because nobody is. When parliaments were formed, when parliaments were created, it would be fair to say that the behaviour of members was primarily governed by a set of rules, or standing orders in our case, that set out how members should behave, and if they did not behave in that way, the house would deal with them for breaching those standards. We have seen over time laws come in to assist and provide more guidance around members' behaviour, and some of the driving force of that is, frankly speaking, because members of Parliament, as the former Speaker rightly said, from all sides of all chambers have not upheld the compact they have with the community on behaviour, and the community expects more.

You can see, certainly not just in this country but across the world, that communities are fraying in terms of their views of how their elected leaders behave. Partly that is because of a greater deal of scrutiny and probity, which is seeing behaviour in a far closer way, but it is also because the community will always have a very strong expectation of their elected representatives – and so they should. This bill I think adds to that work by ensuring that there is a framework that provides appropriate protections and appropriate ways in which this workplace works but also in how members work more broadly. That is why I do want to put on record a number of things. The government have, in my view, on this bill, worked outside of their own party in a way that I have not seen before, and I think that that is worth acknowledging. The government have definitely engaged with and amended a proposed bill in a way that I have not seen before. They have worked on a draft, and you can see in a

number of areas, including areas where I did not think there would be compromise. On things like the scrutiny of ministers, the government have certainly amended the framework to come into this place in a way that I think the non-government members will feel more comfortable about considering. I think that it is important to acknowledge the government's work on that.

But there are other areas that have not landed yet. I know the shadow spoke about this in relation to legal costs and the litigious nature of the community more generally. There is an allowance for a mechanism by which ministers and parliamentary secretaries have access to legal costs in terms of dealing with matters in this process. The shadow did make it clear that when this bill comes before the upper house we will need to land on an outcome on that policy issue. The shadow I think made it very, very clear that he has accepted in good faith the Premier's and the government's commitment to look at that policy issue before that is considered by the upper house. We take the government at their word, because we have certainly approached this bill in a way that is in my view collaborative. Having been part of many conversations around the work that has been done on this bill, we have certainly approached this bill in a collaborative way, as have the government. I think what has come before this house shows, frankly speaking, that sometimes when governments put bills to the crossbench the crossbench can improve the bills and make the bills a better joint outcome. There is no doubt that that is the case, so I restate that there have been a number of amendments that have been made around the way privileges work, the way that ministers are held accountable and the way that certain position holders are appointed. All of these things have, over time, improved. That is not to say that the government have compromised where they intended to go; I do not mean to say that at all. Oftentimes the opposition has been able to talk through some of the specifics and worked to a point where what has come before this place is, in my view, a better outcome. It does not mean that they are perfect, and I mention the issue of legal costs and again implore the Premier that that policy issue does need to be resolved. I just would not want to see a debate in the upper house have to focus on that if that issue were not resolved by the time it was debated.

Many members in this place of all sides have mentioned the frivolous complaints or the vexatious complaints and the capacity for the weaponisation of the complaints system. I have come to the view that there is no doubt in my mind that this system will be weaponised. I do not think it is possible for it not to be. I think that it is just not possible for it not to be, in that there will always be someone who misuses a system to undermine members of Parliament they do not like. That unfortunately will form part of this system. We will see unfortunately complaints which are found to have no basis reported to the house, as is required by the bill, even where there has been found no substance. Those reports will land in the chamber, and all media outlets will write about them despite the fact that there has been no finding of substance. Unfortunately that is going to happen, both in relation to members and also to ministers. It will feature as part of the process, and there is no full protection from that. I think it would have been possible to slightly tweak the process to probably protect a little more from that; however, I accept that the government has taken the view that everything in relation to these issues is about balance at the end of the day. To ensure there is a full framework of protection, you sometimes need to probably lean in, and that certainly is the case in relation to that element.

I wanted to put those particular matters on the record along with the hope that by the time this bill gets to the Council, that final policy matter especially is dealt with, because the community deserves members who behave in the best possible way, and we have seen instances where that has not occurred. I think it would be fair to say things that we saw in the last federal Parliament shocked the community to its core. That is just a fact. I think that the framework that will be in place will certainly enhance how the community expects, but also what they can expect – because this is in place. With that, I will leave my comments there.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (18:38): Today I rise to contribute to the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024, and this is not just a legislative change but an important step towards upholding the integrity and standards that our government and its representatives are held to. The Allan Labor government's commitment to strengthening our parliamentary standards and integrity regime

is not merely about compliance, it is also about ensuring that our democracy operates at its highest ethical standard. The new parliamentary standards and integrity commission will have a key role examining the behaviour of members of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries, which will include things such as bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and victimisation. This reform is rooted in our responsibility to serve the people of Victoria with transparency, accountability and fairness.

I want to acknowledge the contribution from the member for Bundoora, Minister for Precincts and Minister for Creative Industries. Clearly he knows best out of all of us in regard to the behaviours – and poor behaviours – of people within the previous Parliament from his role as the Speaker. Unfortunately when some of those on the opposition benches want to sling mud at the government and say it is just government people, then clearly the previous Speaker –

**A member** interjected.

**Steve McGHIE:** I was not referring to you; I was referring to the member for Warrandyte. It is about all parties, and that is what this integrity commission is all about. It will provide crucial avenues for complaints to be heard and investigated through a proper process, and we know that the current arrangements are not fit for purpose and are out of step with the standards in other workplaces around the country.

The weaponising of this bill by some opposite, who are using the bill to attack the government, is inappropriate and certainly inconsiderate of anyone who has experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault, discrimination – any type of harassment or bullying in any workplace. I do remind those opposite that there was previously, in 2021, a report on the federal government at the time – the Morrison government – called the Sparke Helmore report, which has never been released, but certainly some of those opposite in the Victorian opposition are named in that report. As I said, that report has never been released. If those opposite thought that that held up the highest integrity, I think they would want to have another look at themselves in regard to that.

I would like to remind those present here that more people are affected by this inappropriate workplace behaviour than we know. There was a survey by the Australian Human Rights Commission that found that only 18 per cent of employees who have experienced inappropriate workplace behaviour have reported that inappropriate behaviour. There is a lot of work to be done in that space so that people can feel that they are safe to come forward and report any inappropriate actions towards them within any workplace, including this workplace. That is one in five people that report any issues against them. I just want to remind members in this chamber that they should be mindful of that when they are speaking about this issue.

The Minister for Women mentioned that in federal Parliament a survey revealed more than half of all employees experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment or attempted or actual sexual assault – again, this is a shocking figure. It is the same workplace that in 1984 passed the world's first sex discrimination act, making sexual harassment in the workplace unlawful.

We have heard that Operation Watts was a very comprehensive investigation by IBAC and the Victorian Ombudsman, and they identified critical areas where our current systems can and must be improved, and that is exactly what this bill will deliver: the recommendations put forth in their report alongside additional measures to address inappropriate workplace behaviour within our parliamentary institutions. We are signalling a very clear intention to restore trust and confidence in our democratic processes, which we have heard time and time again is one of the most important priorities to the Victorian community.

As previous contributions have mentioned, this will be the most significant overhaul of parliamentary oversight in the country. It is landmark legislation which culminates extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including government and non-government MPs, Victoria's integrity agencies, parliamentary officials and experts in law, workplace standards, human rights, equal

opportunity and gender equality. It is designed to address the findings and recommendations in the Operation Watts report and to respond comprehensively to the identified shortcomings in our current oversight of parliamentary conduct. It is the first legislated parliamentary investigatory commission within Australian legislation.

These changes transcend party lines, because it is about safeguarding the workers that work in this workplace. For all its traditions and conventions, I agree with the member for Malvern: this is indeed a modern workplace and our standards here must reflect modern standards. This place is too important to have issues such as bullying, sexual harassment, assault or discrimination within its walls. As an elected member of this place I want a positive environment; I want to foster a healthy, safe and respectful workplace. Of course as an ex-union boss who dealt with a lot of bullying and harassment in the workplace – and sexual assault – I would not stand for it as a union boss in representing members and I would not expect that any member here would stand for those types of actions towards any other person within this particular workplace or even outside of this workplace as part of their duties. It is about ensuring that every member of Parliament upholds the high standards of conduct both inside and outside the chambers. It is about creating an environment where every voice is heard and respected and valued, and that is exactly what we are trying to deliver.

In regard to upholding the high standards of conduct, I would like to make an anecdotal reference to what the member for Bentleigh said about politicians being humans and their behaviours changing because there is always someone trying to catch a politician out. It has been referred to in previous contributions. I do not know whether people know – I have probably raised it before – but I have an identical twin brother, which is interesting at times. When I was elected in 2018 I had to have a word to my twin brother, knowing that he enjoys himself very much – he likes the taste of wine and things like that – and he has got a very short fuse. I just said to him that he will need to pull his head in if someone has a go at him thinking that it is me, and he is not to be caught on camera like Barnaby Joyce laying on the footpath after he tripped over a planter box or something like that. So for the last six years he has had to keep a fairly low profile, which is completely against his lifestyle. But for my sake it has worked out quite well so far – touch wood. We will see how we go. If anyone has got relatives that look like them, make sure you encourage them to pull their head in so the press cannot find something against you.

We all owe it to ourselves and to future generations who choose to service and honour their communities by working in this place to leave behind a system that is much, much stronger – that is fairer and more accountable – than the one that we found. This bill will allow for the establishment of this Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission. Of course it will play an important role in receiving, managing and investigating allegations of parliamentary misconduct and inappropriate workplace behaviour, from bullying and harassment to discrimination and occupational violence. I wish we were not even talking about that – that it would not even be contemplated in this workplace. It will be able to receive anonymous reports, and it will act to encourage people to report misconduct. That is what we want to eliminate – misconduct in all those forms that have previously been described. This is a really important bill for this Parliament. It has taken a long time to get here. I am pleased that it is a Labor government that is introducing this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (18:48): It is a delight to rise tonight to speak about the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. I want to just reflect at the outset on the comments made by the Minister for Precincts, the member for Bundoora – and they were also reflected by the member for Melton – about this being an opportunity to actually raise the bar and lift the standards of this place. It has been disappointing to see that some members in this place have used this as an opportunity to take pot shots at members of the Labor Party for activities that have occurred in the past when I think everyone can think of pretty clear examples of members from other parties who have also conducted themselves in an inappropriate way.

I also note that the member for Warrandyte did make a particular example about IBAC and was calling out Labor attacks on the IBAC Commissioner. I note that just in the previous sitting week the Shadow

Attorney-General made some fairly unsavoury comments about the current IBAC Commissioner and the perceived lack of work that they are doing on their current operations. I think it would behove all of us across the whole chamber to be approaching this bill with the intent with which it has been put up, as the member for Brighton has said. There has been a lot of work done across all parties of the Parliament because this is an important bill. This is an important bill to lift the standards of our workplace and lift the standards of integrity throughout the Parliament.

The member for Bentleigh I think was noting his journey into Parliament – the transition into Parliament – and how one has to I guess not adopt a different persona but adopt certain responsibilities. You have a much higher responsibility when you are elected to this place. It is interesting for me to reflect, not coming from a political background and having worked in engineering, that almost from the very day that I was elected the common refrain to me was, ‘Oh, well, you’re just a politician.’ There was an immediate switch in perception of what I was simply from standing and then being elected and being a politician.

I would like to have a look at some research that has been published by the Governance Institute of Australia. It talks about ethical behaviour and how the public perceives the ethics of various occupations and professions. Sadly, engineers are not on there, but the member for Melton might be pleased to note that ambulance service occupations – paramedics – are the second highest, after fire emergency service workers. They are given a rating of 80, which is a very ethical rating. They are number two out of all the occupations. Sadly, state politicians are ranked fourth bottom. They are ranked in neither the ethical nor unethical categories. I know between the member for Melton’s time being a paramedic and his coming to Parliament, he was also a very proud representative of the ambulance union, but unfortunately he has had a fall from grace from being in one of the most respected, ethical professions to being in one of the least. Pleasingly, state politicians actually rate above federal politicians, so we are in a good –

**James Newbury** interjected.

**Paul HAMER:** Every cloud does have a silver lining, as the member for Brighton says. But I think it is unfortunate that the community at large does not hold politicians – whether it is federal, state or local government politicians – in great esteem. Unfortunately there have been well-publicised instances that have I guess helped solidify some public opinion. Any action that can be taken to lift standards and demonstrate to the public that we are a modern workplace and we are a workplace that respects the standards that are expected in Australia at this point in time is a good thing, even more so because we are the leaders of the community and we have to not only be doing the right thing but be seen to be doing the right thing. Having laws in place that solidify this behaviour can only be a good thing.

To reiterate some of the key features of the bill, the bill will establish a Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission, which will be able to receive, manage, investigate and resolve allegations of parliamentary misconduct and public interest complaints. It will strengthen the Victorian parliamentary standards and integrity framework by establishing the existing Parliamentary Integrity Adviser – who we already have on the precinct – in legislation to provide confidential advice and training to members of Parliament, ministers and parliamentary secretaries. The bill will also establish in legislation a Parliamentary Ethics Committee to foster an ethical parliamentary workplace, and amend the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978, including to update the MP code of conduct, to create positive obligations for members to create a safe workplace and demonstrate respect for the commission and the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser. Finally, it will also amend other relevant acts to integrate the commission and the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser into Victoria’s existing parliamentary standards and integrity framework.

Under the bill members of Parliament will have a positive obligation to foster a healthy, safe, respectful and inclusive environment in the parliamentary workplace that is free from bullying, sexual harassment, assault and discrimination. This is what the Victorian community expect and deserve. The



majority of people, both elected and those who work for us as our staffers, and of course also the parliamentary staff, come into this workplace because of their respect for the institution of Parliament and the importance of the work that goes on in this place. We all deserve a safe workplace. Everybody in this work environment – everyone in Parliament and everyone in the parliamentary offices, the electorate offices and the ministers offices – works incredibly hard, puts in an enormous amount of hours and sacrifices a lot of time. If we look here, we are now at almost 7 o'clock on a Tuesday evening. Many of us have families that are currently not seeing their mother or their father or someone in their family or their partner because we are doing work for the community.

It is important not just, obviously, for members themselves but for all the staff that are working for the members and for all the people who are working for Parliament that they have standards that are upheld to the highest order. No-one should feel that they are coming into an unsafe workplace and being threatened or feel that they may be harassed or intimidated or bullied in any particular way. So having a confidential process that staff and members of Parliament are able to address and process I think can only be a positive sign for the Parliament and for the community as a whole, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (18:57): It gives me great pleasure to stand before you and speak in favour of the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Bill 2024. The purpose of this is obviously to ensure high standards are upheld in this place, and no-one, no party, no individual is above the highest standards. Ultimately, we are members of Parliament, and we need to ensure that we hold ourselves to the absolute highest standards in the community. Unfortunately, there have been clear examples across all the aisles – it does not matter which side of the fence you are on – of foul behaviour in the past. That is not something that we should be proud of, but it is something that we should reflect on. On that, I want to make mention of the fact that so much work has gone into this bill to ensure that it has been done in a thorough way to make sure that we as members of Parliament hold our heads up high and make sure that we have the highest standards and integrity. I do not get it. People work so hard to get into this place. Some have had life ambitions to get here. Then they get in, and unfortunately there is foul play and they slip up, and it is just not acceptable. It does not matter what the scandal is, it is a scandal, and it is unacceptable for any member of Parliament to be tied up in anything like that.

This bill will ensure that we know what our code of conduct is and we know what standards we have to uphold, and I would like to think that everyone will read through this bill thoroughly and make sure that they live up to these standards. We need to ensure that we have a workplace which is safe and where we are respected, because as we know, MPs need to be held to the highest standards possible. It is absolutely what the Victorian community expects.

Many of you may not know, but I was actually elected to Hobsons Bay City Council in 2008. I will never forget when I was elected to Hobsons Bay City Council that Joan Kirner, a dear friend of mine, a mentor and somebody that I really believed in, called me up and said, 'Luba, if you're going to do one thing, you have to lead with integrity.'

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

### **Land tax**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (19:00): (701) My issue tonight is for the Treasurer, and it is about land tax. It is very simple. I say to the Treasurer: lower land tax; you are destroying the state. Here is a bill from a block of land in Melbourne's outer south-eastern suburbs: 2022 land tax assessment; the bill, \$3015. Same block of land, unimproved: \$38,302 just one year later. In 2024 the land tax assessment

notice is \$83,192 for the same block of land. This is highway robbery. At least Ned Kelly had the decency to wear a mask when he was robbing you, unlike you thieves opposite.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind the member for Bulleen to talk through the Chair and not reflect on the Chair.

### **Cambridge Reserve, Hoppers Crossing**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (19:01): (702) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is that the minister update my constituents on the progress of the new Cambridge Reserve dog park in Hoppers Crossing. The Allan Labor government has shown a steadfast commitment to enhancing community spaces – particularly dog parks, which play a crucial role in the wellbeing of our residents and of course their pets. Following a promise made during the 2022 election the government has been working on delivering 14 new dog parks right across Victoria. Among these is a brand new dog park in Hoppers Crossing, which stands out as a highly anticipated addition to our thriving community. The announcement of this dog park has been met with great enthusiasm. It is one of the most popular commitments we have made in Hoppers Crossing, highlighting the deep bond people have with their pets. This facility will offer a safe, spacious environment where dogs can run freely and socialise, contributing to better health outcomes for pets and their owners. This park is not just about recreation but about creating local jobs during the construction phase and providing more opportunities for Victorians to enjoy the outdoors with their pets. I look forward to the response from the fantastic minister.

### **Patient transport**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (19:03): (703) My adjournment matter for this evening is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to take action to fix some of the operational issues that are occurring with the non-emergency patient transport (NEPT) scheme. I am aware that the government undertook a review, by the member for Melton, and that that review has been with the government for quite some time. Indeed I got a letter back from the minister in March saying that the government was considering the outcomes of that review.

The reason I think action is needed on this is that I have had a number of constituents who have had significant issues with booking and using non-emergency patient transport. Indeed on multiple occasions two gentlemen, separately, have missed appointments that they had booked in Melbourne with specialists because they simply did not have someone from the NEPT service turn up. These are cases where they have made a booking, they have had a booking confirmed and the non-emergency ambulance has either not turned up at all or turned up so late that they were not going to be able to make the appointment in Melbourne. Indeed on a couple of occasions they have gone halfway there only to be called by the relevant medical professional or hospital and told, 'Sorry, you're too late; you're going to have to rebook.' Everybody will understand how difficult it can be to rebook, particularly for a specialist appointment.

We had one instance where the constituent was told that the appointment was cancelled because someone had put the pick-up and the drop-off address in as the same address. Instead of ringing the constituent to say, 'What is the correct address?', they just cancelled the appointment. For another one just recently, in the last week or so, my constituent from Sale was left stranded in Melbourne even though he had booked, through his GP, non-emergency patient transport to go to an appointment and back in the same day. Twice when he rang to say, 'Where is my return trip?', he was told, 'No, no, no, you're not leaving until tomorrow; you're booked in for a hospital stay overnight,' which was incorrect.

If these things happened once or twice, you would understand that these things happen, but it seems to be happening repeatedly. I do not know whether the review that the member for Melton has done has recommended anything that will actually fix some of these issues.

**Steve McGhie** interjected.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** This is actually with Ambulance Victoria, member for Melton. These ones in particular were Ambulance Victoria, not emergency patient transport – not the privatised operations – and so I ask the minister to take action to fix these issues. It is costing people in regional Victoria appointments, costing them money, costing them time and no doubt costing the taxpayer as well, given the messes that are happening. This section needs to be fixed as quickly as possible.

### **Recycle4Change**

**Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:05): (704)** My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Corrections and Youth Justice, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit Recycle4Change in North Geelong, who are supporting the Victorian state government's container deposit scheme. Recycle4Change are more than just a recycling initiative, and their core mission is to provide employment and support to individuals with justice system experience. They believe in second chances, offering employment and support to individuals with lived experience of the justice system. Their aim is to reduce reoffending and create a safer, more inclusive society. Recycle4Change offers fully inclusive employment with no barriers or judgement based on criminal history, race, religion, sexual identity or ethnicity. It also plays a big part in reducing environmental impact resulting from waste, playing an integral part in Victoria's circular economy. I am really proud of the work that they are doing for the community, and I cannot wait to host the minister for a visit at their North Geelong depot so he can see the benefits their program brings to people who have lived experience of the justice system.

### **Nepean electorate housing**

**Sam GROTH (Nepean) (19:07): (705)** My adjournment tonight is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for her and the government to be transparent with the constituents in Nepean and on the Mornington Peninsula about where they plan to build their new target of 31,000 houses in the Mornington Peninsula shire – where they will be built, what density and any changes they have planned to green wedge zones to accommodate these new homes. We know that housing and homelessness is an issue; it is affecting people right across the state. There are people who are struggling to find housing and to get mortgages, and of course we need to see more housing built. There is a cost-of-living crisis, but the problem needs real solutions, not a government that has a housing plan that is full of fantasy.

We have seen this government this week abandon their housing plan of 80,000 homes a year – 800,000 homes being built over the next 10 years – for a new plan of 2.5 million homes over 27 years. They have gone from 80,000 homes to 90,000 a year with no capacity or capability, and it is a target that when you push it out that far you cannot be held accountable to. There is no wonder they have tried to change their mind. The 31,000 homes they build are additional homes, so new dwellings. It has set off alarm bells, certainly within my community. We value responsible, considered development on the Mornington Peninsula, especially the southern part, and we also want to make sure that that green wedge is protected. We know the Mornington Peninsula is wedged between Port Phillip and Western Port Bay. We are limited for space down there, and large parts of it absolutely are protected. We need to know where these homes will go. Are we all of a sudden going to see high-rise developments going up along the beach areas? Is that this government's plan, or do they plan to just completely steamroll over green wedge protections? These are real concerns the community has, and the government just cannot obscure details and push off into the distance their confused and improbable housing plans.

This government is intent on taxing Victorians when it comes to property – more than two dozen new and increased property taxes over the last 10 years. Labor cannot manage money. They are taxing people out of the property market. They are putting unrealistic targets onto people. Victorians need real action when it comes to housing, not fanciful targets of 90,000 homes a year, 2.5 million homes,

27 years, 2051. Let us be realistic, and let us be clear where these houses are going to go and whether they are going to steamroll planning in this state.

### **Ripon electorate housing**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (19:09): (706) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Housing in the other place. The action I seek is that the minister provides me an update on the Allan Labor government's Regional Housing Fund and how it will benefit communities across the Ripon electorate. The need for more affordable housing is raised with me by constituents, community groups and stakeholders every single day. Currently there are 58,459 applications for social housing across Victoria, including 432 families in Maryborough, 261 in Ararat, 182 in Creswick, 85 in Beaufort, 51 in Avoca and 33 in Wedderburn, and the list goes on. We have limited homelessness outreach services across Ripon and next to no transitional housing or crisis accommodation. Communities are calling out for more housing, with many trying to advance local solutions, including the Wedderburn Lions Club, who have secured land next to the neighbourhood house to build housing for older residents, and they just need investment and an interested service provider.

The Dunolly District Hospital Auxiliary have also secured land next to the local hospital for 18 units to house older residents in town, with many locals eager to move in. In Ararat, Clunes, Maryborough, Skipton and St Arnaud there is huge demand for key worker housing to expand our local industries and support agricultural businesses. And in Newbridge and Talbot we could build hundreds more affordable homes if we had the enabling infrastructure, including sewerage.

The need is there, and our government wants to help. Recently I attended the opening of four brand new homes for social housing renters in Ararat. They were delivered thanks to \$1.8 million from our Labor government in partnership with Ararat Rural City Council, Haven Home Safe, E2E Growth Consultants and JG King Homes. Renters said the news had made their year, and it made mine too. My passion for ending homelessness and securing more housing for our region is what drives me most in this place, and I cannot wait to see more affordable homes built in the future. I welcome an update from the minister on how our government will deliver more affordable housing through the Regional Housing Fund.

### **Narracan electorate housing**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:11): (707) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is that she take immediate action to clarify how the government intend to meet their targets for Baw Baw shire's housing target and what they have mandated. They have mandated another 24,700 dwellings in Baw Baw shire by 2051. I do not know how they are going to achieve this, when in the last 12 months there has been a total of 316 approvals – that is, 283 houses and 33 townhouses. So how is the Baw Baw shire expected to do a 300 per cent uptick to meet a government target? And this is off the back of the government shifting the responsibility of 80,000 homes a year for the next 10 years, which they have failed at miserably. Within the first two years they are going to be 70,000 houses below where their target is, so how do they expect the Baw Baw shire to achieve this target?

It is totally wrong to shift the responsibility onto local councils, seeing that this was a government promise. It was not a council promise, it was a government promise. So how are they going to do this? What is the plan for these councils to get these out when I have at the moment residential subdivisions taking up to seven years to be approved? How about we look at regulation reform so councils have an opportunity to meet the targets the government is setting? This is a false target. The 80,000 houses a year for the next 10 years was a false claim. The government needs to re-establish its targets and put in targets that are achievable rather than raising the hopes of Victorians for them to get a house. This is wrong. The government are being very misleading in what they are doing, and I want the minister to explain how this target is going to be achieved.

**Bruce Park, Frankston**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (19:13): (708) My adjournment matter is for the minister for sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to come and visit the Bruce Park Tennis Club, Frankston Rovers, Heatherhill Cricket Club and Heatherhill Football Club at Bruce Park sporting facility.

**Sam Groth** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: Yes, I am sure you could show us a couple of things on the tennis court there. I have spoken to this club for quite some time. The president of the Heatherhill Football Club Zac White has been instrumental in gaining a long-term commitment for redevelopment of this facility. The 1200 members of this club certainly deserve more than they have got at the moment. Council, the federal government and the state government have all shown their interest in this. Council have in their long-term infrastructure planning a \$2.4 million commitment in 2028. So I would love the minister to come down and meet some of the amazing kids there and the adult members of these sporting clubs. Come and say g'day and see what kinds of clubrooms they have got and what facilities they have got and have a chat about how we can improve them.

**Traffic accident reports**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (19:15): (709) My adjournment debate tonight is for the Minister for Police, and the action that I seek is for the minister to introduce changes to Victoria Police policy to ensure that traffic accident reports are available at no cost to individuals that are involved in traffic accidents. Recently a constituent of mine reached out to my office following a traffic collision between them and another vehicle in which my constituent was identified as not being at fault, as the other driver ran a red light, resulting in them being collided with. My constituent immediately sought a record of the incident from the attending police officer, who then advised that they would provide the report at a later date. They followed up the matter at the local police station two weeks later and were subsequently advised that they would have to apply for the report online at a cost of \$57.20. However, if they were making an insurance claim they could request a copy directly from their insurer. As the constituent was not making a claim, they would have no choice but to pay the fee to get a copy of the report for their own records.

I am surprised and astounded that for a person to get a copy of a traffic accident report, especially an accident where they are not responsible, they still need to pay a fee of \$57.20. I am sure the minister would agree that the last thing a person needs after they have gone through a traumatic car accident where they are not at fault is to have to pay another fee to the government to be able to access this information.

**Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Queenscliff flotilla**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (19:16): (710) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the Queenscliff coastguard unit when their new marine search-and-rescue vehicle is delivered and to meet the hardworking volunteers, who respond to more than 80 incidents each year. In the 2023–24 state budget over \$2 million was announced to provide a new marine search-and-rescue vessel for the Queenscliff coastguard to continue their work in helping our community, especially our boating community. In September last year I was invited to go out on one of their smaller boats to learn about the work that they do, and flotilla commander Michael Donohue and the crew took me out to the rip just off Point Lonsdale. They head out into some really volatile situations out there, and they assist those boaters who find themselves in trouble. Recently we announced, after a competitive tender process, that a Victorian company, Alumarine, will build the new search-and-rescue vessel, and I look forward to seeing that completed vessel when it is delivered, which will serve our community. I would be pleased to welcome the minister to visit Queenscliff coastguard and see firsthand our government's investment in delivering safer waters for all Victorians.

**Responses**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (19:18): The member for Bulleen had a question to the Treasurer in relation to land tax. The member for Tarneit had a question for the Minister for Environment in relation to Cambridge Reserve dog park, which is highly used, in Hoppers Crossing. The member for Gippsland South had a question for the Minister for Ambulance Services relating to operational services. The member for Lara had a question to the Minister for Corrections and Minister for Youth Justice requesting a visit to Recycle4Change, who offer employment and support for those connected to the justice system. The member for Nepean to the Premier relating to housing targets. The member for Ripon had an issue which will be referred to the Minister for Housing in the other place seeking an update on the Regional Housing Fund. I do note the member for Ripon is a keen advocate for her community, and I will be sure to pass this on to the Minister for Housing.

The member for Narracan had an adjournment matter to the Minister for Planning relating to housing targets. The member for Frankston had an adjournment matter to the minister for sport to visit Bruce Park to see the sporting facilities, which house cricket and football clubs and a fantastic membership of over 1200, which is pretty amazing. The member for Warrandyte's adjournment matter was for the Minister for Police seeking some policy changes relating to traffic accidents. The member for Bellarine had a matter relating to the Minister for Emergency Services to visit the Queenscliff coastguard unit when the marine search-and-rescue vessel is delivered and also meet the hardworking volunteers. We know that volunteers do so much work and show commitment for emergency services, and we know that they are an integral part of our communities, in particular in the Bellarine region. That concludes the adjournment.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

**House adjourned 7:20 pm.**